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## **THESIS**

**WOLVES IN WOLVES' CLOTHING: THE ROLE OF THE  
CHECHEN MAFIA IN THE FORMATION OF AN  
INDEPENDENT CHECHEN REPUBLIC**

by

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June 2011

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IN THE FORMATION OF AN INDEPENDENT CHECHEN REPUBLIC**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The path to Chechen autonomy has been tumultuous. Over the past 200 years, internal and external forces have played significant roles in shaping the territory and identity of the Chechen nation. Fierce resistance by Chechens has led Russian officials to label the region's inhabitants as criminals. Chechen criminality was also affected by punishments for this resistance. Chechen resistance eventually led to the mass criminalization of the entire Chechen ethnicity.

Mass criminalization exposed the Chechens to a wider Russian criminal world. Through illegal activities, Chechen criminals amassed significant resources. As the Soviet Union fell, Chechen organized crime groups were poised to support the bid for national independence led by former Soviet General Djohar Dudayev.

This thesis contends that bottom-up and top-down forces were critical in forming a perception of Chechen criminality. The perception of criminality and its attendant punishments supported the rise of actual criminality, in a time where crime made possible the amassing of significant amounts of wealth and power. It was wealth and power that Dudayev's fledgling government needed, Chechen organized crime groups would provide but at a cost. While providing material support to Dudayev organized crime elements infiltrated government positions to further their own interests.

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

ASSR	Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic
BRDM	Combat Reconnaissance Patrol Vehicle
GULAG	Chief Administration of Corrective Labor Camps and Colonies
KGB	Committee for State Security
MVD	Ministry of Internal Affairs
NKGB	People's Commissariat for State Security
NKVD	People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs
OKChN	All-National Congress of Chechen Peoples
SSR	Soviet Socialist Republic

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, criminals have played important roles in the formation of nation-states. In emerging states, bandits have allowed a central authority to exert influence that exceeded its capabilities. As the central authority's power grew, fringe elements, like bandits and other non-conformists, were gradually brought under firmer control. Elements that resisted the new authority's control were re-labeled criminals and subjected to harsher treatment.<sup>1</sup> Criminals that were capable of greater organization stood a better chance of avoiding punishment and integrating into the new social construct largely unchanged.

Organized crime has historically both aided and stymied the formation of a central state. Afghanistan, Columbia, and Montenegro serve as examples of locations where criminal organizations affected attempts to expand government control. In each example organized crime has insinuated itself into the government. Afghanistan is the most recent example. In assessing the current Afghan security environment, one cannot separate government officials, insurgent groups, organized criminals and the population. Each of the elements has over time become increasingly tied to the government, providing services (revenue, security, money laundering) in exchange for political power and protection.<sup>2</sup> Colombia provides another example of the nexus of criminal organizations and established government structures. From the 1970s onward, the Colombian government provided varying degrees of political protection and positions in the government in exchange for economic and military assistance from the narco-traffickers.<sup>3</sup> Montenegro provides yet another perspective on the criminal-state nexus. In response to increasingly stiff economic restrictions from Serbia, Montenegrin leader Milo

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<sup>1</sup> Eric Hobsbawn, *Bandits* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981) and John Dickie, *Cosa Nostra: A History of the Sicilian Mafia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) provide both a theoretical and practical basis for expanding state power through interaction with fringe elements.

<sup>2</sup> Matt DuPee, "The Narcotics Emirate of Afghanistan: Examining Armed Politics and Their Roles in Illicit Drug Production and Conflict in Afghanistan 1980–2010" (MS Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2010), 103.

<sup>3</sup> Nazih Richani, *Systems of Violence: The Political Economy of War and Peace in Colombia* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), 102–103.

Djukanovic facilitated the activities of an international cigarette trafficking network. The revenues garnered from the taxation of transiting cigarettes provided Djukanovic with much of the operating funds to run the country.<sup>4</sup> Each of these countries continues to cause varying degrees of trouble to regional and international communities, largely as a result of the criminal-state connection. With weak police and legal traditions, neither Chechnya nor Russia has escaped this phenomenon.

Trends in state formation, particularly consolidated democracies, have progressed in a manner that reduces the visibility of organized crime in legitimate government activities. Domestic and foreign policies of consolidated democracies, while not immune to the influences of organized crime, generally aim to further national interests, not the interests of individuals. Organized crime, however, tends to be less concerned with the survival of the state and more interested in the advancement of the organization economic or security interests. No modern state is completely devoid of the influence of organized crime, but those with weak institutions and high levels of corruption are most at risk. In all governments, a symbiotic relationship with organized crime exists, however its intensity varies significantly. Afghanistan, Colombia, and Montenegro provide ready examples of such a symbiosis. The symbiosis can take many forms, criminal elements can provide sources of revenue for political figures as in Montenegro, or they can provide political power as in Afghanistan, or they can augment governmental instruments of force as in Colombia. In some instances, the crime-state relationship results in a net positive, as with Montenegro. However, danger emerges when legitimate state structures are usurped by criminal elements and national interests are redefined often to the detriment of national stability. Afghanistan, Colombia, and Chechnya provide instances where criminalized state structures have undermined regional stability.

## **A. HYPOTHESIS**

The path towards an independent Chechen republic has been tumultuous and largely unfulfilled. Over the past 200 years, internal and external forces have combined

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<sup>4</sup> Misha Glenny, *McMafia: A Journey Through the Global Criminal Underworld* (New York, Vintage Books, 2009), 21–37.



to play significant roles in shaping a Chechen identity and shared nationality. From the onset of imperial Russian expansion into the Caucasus, Chechens have been subjected to a series of converging factors that have contributed to the eventual establishment of robust organized crime elements. Chechens have attempted several bottom-up efforts to develop a national identity. Concurrently with these efforts, Russian and then Soviet governments attempted to impose artificial territorial and political structures, producing an opposing set of forces. Soviet experiments in nation building built upon imperial policies, further pushing the Chechen society farther towards criminality.<sup>5</sup>

Criminality, or the perception thereof, linked both processes. More significant than mere criminality is the involvement of Chechens within the wider Russian organized crime structure. With the relaxing of Soviet control in the late 1980s, Chechen organized crime elements blossomed into an entity with the necessary resources to support a viable independence movement. During the initial bid for independence, Chechen criminal elements provided the coordination and logistics structures needed by the emerging Chechen national leadership. As the independence movement grew the relationship became increasingly intertwined to the point where drawing a distinct line between national entities and organized criminals became impossible.

Neither the notorious Chechen ‘Mafia’ nor the nascent Chechen state emerged in the late twentieth century free from Russian and Soviet influences. The transition from the “egalitarian” society characteristic of eighteenth century Chechnya to an ethnic nation-state is directly related to Russo-Chechen interactions. The extensive interactions produced a combination of bottom-up and top-down forces that resulted in a criminalized population, a strong national identity, and a disputed ethnic homeland. All three factors provided a foundation that would set the conditions for a merger between powerful Chechen criminal elements and a Chechen independence movement.

In articulating the confluence of Chechen crime elements and a national leadership, three elements bear consideration: the development of the Chechen Mafia, the genesis of Chechen national identity and struggle for a *de jure* independent Chechen

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<sup>5</sup> Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) 20,186–191.

state. Throughout the history, these three elements have been shaped and re-shaped by both sides of the Russo-Chechen relationship. As such, each side bears a proportional share of the responsibility for the region's current security state.

## **B. PROBLEMS**

Because of the secretive natures of organized crime and Chechen society an extensive body of literature relating to this topic is unavailable. The growth of Russian organized crime came into popular consciousness during the 1990s, but the chaotic environment of post-Soviet Russia did not lend itself to deep analytical studies. Reporters, not academics, produced most of the works relating to the subject, and they tended to more focus on the "Russian" variants of organized crime.

First hand accounts of the organization and functioning of Russian, much less Chechen, organized crime is lacking. Successful criminals outside of the former Soviet Union are generally loath to write memoirs. Organized crime groups influenced by the secretive "thief's world" are even less inclined to autobiographies; this is compounded when the criminals are Chechen. Statistical data is similarly difficult to find and when found its accuracy and completeness is often called into question. Crime data is generally drawn from police reports and the connection between law enforcement organizations and criminals in Russia and Chechnya tends to place such figures in doubt. In light of the opaque nature of the subject, it was necessary to approach the subject from a different angle, by looking for motivation, capability and opportunity to explain the perceived state of Chechnya today.

## **C. METHODS AND SOURCES**

Events that occurred during the early stages of the Russo-Chechen relationship set in motion a pattern of action and re-action that resonates today. Imperial Russian perceptions and policies toward the borderlands were adopted and modified by the Soviet leaders those policies largely remain in effect. Attempting to isolate the interaction of organized crime elements and the national movement in Chechnya to the last twenty years would likely miss many of the more important causal mechanisms.

The analysis will follow three main trends: the development of the Chechen homeland, the Chechen identity and Chechen involvement in organized crime. Since all three aspects have been affected by the relationship with Russia the analysis will necessarily include salient aspects of the Russian experience. Of specific interest will be the factors of the Muscovite/Russian expansion into steppe. During the Muscovite expansion, patterns of imperial rule were developed that contributed to the unique character of the Russo-Chechen relationship. Aside from a foray into the formation of the Russian Empire, the majority of the analysis will be concerned with the Russo-Chechen relationship beginning in the late eighteenth century.

The nature of organized crime tends to be secretive even in the most open of societies. This secretive nature generally precludes the conduct of detailed quantitative studies. The size and intent of organized crime elements remains unclear even to its criminal participants. Law enforcement statistics provide an equally murky picture of the expanse of organized crime. In many case throughout the West, law enforcement statistics are biased, some times intentionally at other time unintentionally. Soviet and post-Soviet organized crime is doubly difficult, as law enforcement is a secretive organization attempting to thrive in an equally secretive and conspiratorial society. For the purpose of this thesis, extensive use of English language secondary sources will be employed. The limitation to English language sources is directly related to the inability of the author to function in Russian.

Sources will be drawn primarily from scholarly texts, popular media and news sources, and, when appropriate and available, statistics will be employed. Although these statistics generated from law enforcement agencies reflect priorities and biases of the issuing agency and their government. English language newspaper and internet sources will be utilized to characterize the extent of the criminal/state connection. Again, owing to the closed nature of Soviet/Russian society media and internet sources will tend to focus on developments since 1990. For popular Russian perceptions of crime in Chechnya prior to the fall of the Soviet Union, literary sources will be utilized. Russian authors from Pushkin to Solzhenitsyn have described the rich character of the Chechens that will add to the overall understanding of the three themes. When taken in totality, the

available sources will provide sufficient clarity to discern motivations and opportunities of the major elements relating to Chechen organized crime, while providing an historical context.

## **II. THE STRUCTURE OF CRIMINALITY: THE AMORPHOUS CHECHEN STATE**

Throughout history, the Chechen lands have been profoundly affected by extended interaction with Moscow and St Petersburg. It is through this turbulent interaction that the various forms of Chechen government acquired a criminal flavor. The process was not quick nor was it only imposed from above. It occurred over several hundred years, and was influenced from afar. At the center of the interaction is the conflict between a flexible grassroots supra-tribal structure and a more static one imposed from a distance. The tension between both trends generated political friction, which frequently erupted in violence. Violence and resistance further established a scenario where tribal and supra-tribal structures that resisted Russian and Soviet control were deemed, by default criminal. In this way, organic Chechen government structures assumed a decidedly criminal nature, one that would eventually lead to a merger with powerful Chechen organized crime elements.

Before a more detailed discussion of the way government formation influenced the development of a criminal Chechen government, a few words on the concept of a state are warranted. Despite efforts by Chechen figures over the previous two centuries, a formal state along Westphalian lines has never been achieved. At best, the various organic attempts to this end have resulted in forms of a proto-state with the façade of stability. Enduring institutions of state have never been solidified; instead anything above the tribal level has been achieved through charismatic leaders. The structures of government present in the modern incarnation of Chechnya are borrowed from the Soviet/Russian experience. Over the years, perceptions of sovereignty have been reinforced by an unwillingness or inability of an external power, specifically Russia, to exercise full control over the region.

To understand the effects of the Russo-Chechen relationship it is necessary to look at the origins and development of the Russian Empire. Russia's origins affected the manner by which it expanded and the governed the empire. Russian experiences were

transferred to the Soviets, and meshed with Leninist interpretations of Marxism. Methods of consolidation and rule led to Chechen resistance and subsequent criminalization.

Tension between Russians and Chechens were effected not only by the presence of external and internal forces, but also by the character of the forces. Religion played a role in defining the character of the Russo-Chechen relationship, and thereby its tension. It was not merely the differences between Orthodox Russians and an Islamic Chechens, but also the concern posed by two powerful Islamic empires to the south. Russian concerns for a secure border to the south affected the form of their interaction with the Chechens further coloring the nature of the relationship.

The Chechen adoption of Islam and their traditional forms of governance and customs added to the perception of criminality. Both Islam and a secular tribal structure were not compatible with the patterns of Russian and Soviet empire building resulting in a rebellious southern border province. The cumulative result set in motion a process that would produce a Chechen state linked at nearly every level with criminals.

#### **A. TRENDS FROM EARLY RUSSIAN HISTORY**

Details of the exact origin of Muscovy are still under debate. For our discussion, Muscovy's exact origins are not directly relevant to Russian and Soviet policies in Caucasus. However, several inherited characteristics have indirectly affected subsequent policies toward the empire's periphery. The nature of pre-Muscovite society, the adoption of Orthodoxy, prolonged exposure to Mongol practices and the constant concern for security were persistent factors of Muscovy and its successors. These factors shaped the necessity for expansion, the method of expansion as well as the aims and means of controlling conquered lands. All of these factors increased tension in the Russo-Chechen relation producing resistance and then criminality.

The earliest precursors of Muscovy were multi-ethnic traders who expanded from the Baltic Sea toward and down the Volga basin. The traders originated from a variety of northeastern Europe peoples, Jewish, Frisians and Saxon-German, between the seventh

and tenth century.<sup>6</sup> A series of semi-independent trading settlements sprung up to capitalize on the existing slave trade.<sup>7</sup> Each trading post employed locals, Varangars, as guards, mercenaries, or shippers. At times, the Varangars seized control of the trade franchises and expanded the commercial interaction with communities deeper into the steppe.<sup>8</sup> In order to establish and further the commercial potential of a Volga trade route these merchants would have had to possess some degree of multi-linguistic capabilities, for it could not be accomplished by force alone.<sup>9</sup> The emphasis on utility over ethnicity would change over time, but the practice of co-opting useful elements of society would remain a feature throughout the Muscovite expansion into the steppe.

Roughly concurrent with the growth of the Varanger expansion along the Volga basin was the rise of Eastern Slavic tribes. While the Varanger expansion was characterized by its adaptive commercial nature Eastern Slavic expansion was influenced by regional powers. The rise and fall of regional powers left a vacuum that Eastern Slavic tribes readily filled.<sup>10</sup> Like the Varangian to their northeast, the Slavs incorporated minor neighboring powers through co-option or force while assuaging the fears of major regional powers. The savvy growth east eventually culminated in a merger with the Varangian commercial societies. By the tenth century, there was the “beginning of the cultural consolidation of the Rus’ and an attempt at their nationalization,” into a Kievan/Rus community.<sup>11</sup>

Along with a growing position of power, the Kievan/Rus adoption of Orthodox Christianity would be a factor in the eventual character of the Russian Empire. The adoption of Eastern Orthodoxy provided several benefits to a growing Kievan/Rus state. It did not pose a threat to the Byzantine Empire to the south, thereby allowing Kievan

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<sup>6</sup> Omeljan Pritsak, “The Origins of Rus,” *Russian Review* 36 (1977): 259.

<sup>7</sup> Omeljan Pritsak, “The Origins of Rus,” 264.

<sup>8</sup> Omeljan Pritsak, “The Origins of Rus,” 261.

<sup>9</sup> Omeljan Pritsak, “The Origins of Rus,” 256. Omeljan Pritsak notes the Varanger (Viking) were comprised of a mixture of local ethnicities working as guards, shippers, and mercenaries. They had no common ethnicity, the primary commonality being the possession of some skill necessary for the facilitation of a growing regional commercial trade.

<sup>10</sup> Omeljan Pritsak, “The Origins of Rus,” 269.

<sup>11</sup> Omeljan Pritsak, “The Origins of Rus,” 271.

expansion.<sup>12</sup> Orthodoxy was a complete package; there was no need for local religious leaders to develop a complex system of dogma or rites. While not possessing a missionary nature, such as Islam or Catholicism, it did prove to be an effective means of uniting Slavic and non-Slavic elements of the growing empire.<sup>13</sup>

The arrival of the Mongols was the next significant event in the development of Muscovy. There remains a diverging range of opinions concerning the influence the Mongol invasion had upon Muscovite domestic and foreign politics. While the extent and method Mongol practices were transferred to Muscovite leaders remains contentious, all generally agree there were transfers. Administrative structure and practices, economic processes, military tactics and weapons were all significant in the rise and later expansion of the Muscovite state.<sup>14</sup> Muscovy's adoption of portions of the Kipchaq Khanate did provide them with a distinct advantage over other Slavic communities. The administrative structures and practices adopted by Muscovy facilitated the integration of groups previously under the control of the Khanate.<sup>15</sup> The fiscal and political savvy of leaders such as Ivan Kalita (1329–1339) put Muscovy on the path to regional power. While the expansion of Muscovy into the steppe was far from bloodless it was accomplished in large part through co-option.

Muscovy received an additional byproduct of extended contact with the Kipchaq Khanate and growth into the steppe, a near obsessive concern with frontier security. Some scholars such as Joseph Wieczynski have attempted to paint early Russia as a

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<sup>12</sup> W. Bruce Lincoln, *Between Heaven and Hell: The Story of a Thousand Years of Artistic Life in Russia*. (NY: Penguin, 1999), 17–26.

<sup>13</sup> Omeljan Pritsak, "The Origins of Rus," 270–272.

<sup>14</sup> For a more extensive discussion of the influence of the Qipchaq Khanate (aka Golden Horde) refer to the works of Donald Ostrowski. Donald Ostrowski, *Muscovy and the Mongols: Cross Cultural Influences on the Steppe Frontier, 1304–1589* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Donald Ostrowski, "Muscovite Adaptation of Steppe Political Institutions: A Reply to Halperin's Objections" *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1:2 (2000): 267–304; Donald Ostrowski, "Mongol Origins of Muscovite Political Institutions" *Slavic Review* 29:4 (1990): 525–542. The works of Charles Halperin provide an additional perspective to this argument specifically: Charles Halperin, *Russia and the Golden Horde: The Mongol Impact on Medieval Russian History* (Bloomington, IL: Indiana University Press, 1985); Charles Halperin, "Muscovite Political Institutions in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century" *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1:2 (2000): 237–257.

<sup>15</sup> Donald Ostrowski, "The Mongol Origins of Muscovite Political Institutions," *Slavic Review* 49 (1990): 541.



frontier society similar to the American west; arguing that Kievan Russia could have provided a “safety valve” for Europe, in much the same way that the westward expansion did for America. While there may be some degree of validity to these arguments what is not sufficiently addressed are the perceptions of existential threats posed by the frontier. The Muscovite state of the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth century looked to the south and did not see a means to relieve social pressures. Instead, leaders in Moscow looked south and saw danger in many forms. The south represented a financial threat as it provided an escape path for the lower levels of society, primarily serfs. The southern frontier also presented an external threat.<sup>16</sup>

The further south Muscovy expanded the more they came in contact with alien cultures. These cultures frustrated the historic pattern of expansion employed by Moscow. Efforts to subjugate the Caucasus by Russians exemplify the difficulties Moscow experienced in interacting with wholly a different people.

## **B. EXPANSION, SECURITY AND THE FOUNDATION OF MODERN RUSSIA**

For Muscovy, the southern frontiers did not so much represent a social safety valve as a growing security threat. As the Kipchaq Khanate began to unravel, several elements presented a new security threat. Of particular importance were the Khanates of Kazan and Astrakhan. The Muscovite conquest of both of these khanates in the mid-sixteenth century represented the first in a series of offensive campaigns undertaken for ostensibly defensive purposes, breaking from previous Mongol or Muscovite practices.<sup>17</sup> Of particular importance were the efforts to secure the loyalty of former elites, with grants of land and equal status to Muscovite elites in exchange for military service. Moscow tended to view such an arrangement as permanent and immutable, while the

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<sup>16</sup> Joseph L. Wiczyński, “The Frontier in Early Russian History,” *Russian Review* 31 (1972): 112.

<sup>17</sup> Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire: A Multi-ethnic History*, (London, UK: Pearson Education Limited, 2001), 21.

steppe elites saw it in a more transitory fashion.<sup>18</sup> These practices would prove relatively successful in integrating steppe societies, but were largely unworkable with the mountain tribes of Chechnya.

Muscovite policies, of imperial expansion, were largely developed through interaction with the steppe societies during and immediately following the fall of the Kipchaq Khanate. Muscovy's policies consisted of flexible application of military and diplomatic pressure, coupled with the retention and integration of local cultural and political structures. By the time the Russians came into sustained contact with the Chechen tribes, they had been practicing imperial politics successfully for several hundred years. Imperial practices were not uniformly applied instead they were adapted to the peculiarities of the local situation. During the eighteenth century, practices began to be biased towards the use of military force.<sup>19</sup>

The establishment of an ever-expanding series of frontier forts characterized Muscovite expansion. This system of fortresses was justified for two reasons, the necessity for a rapid military response to local resistance, and as a defense against external threats. In the late sixteenth century, external threats remained a valid concern in the form of Crimean Tatars and the Ottoman Empire.<sup>20</sup> As the capacity for Moscow to exert military force expanded the perception of its appropriateness did as well.

Early Muscovite efforts to control the Kazan populace were heavy handed, tending to rely upon military might and terror. Interestingly enough the terror employed during Ivan IV's foray into Kazan would be repeated later in Russian history, specifically, executions and deportation of elites, forced religious conversion, and directed migration to change the local demographics. Understandably, these policies resulted in resistance by locals spurring a change in tactics to a more flexible approach. The modified policies focused upon finding and co-opting local elites who were

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<sup>18</sup> Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire*, 23.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Khordarkovsky, *Russia's Steppe Frontier: The Making of a Colonial Empire, 1500–1800* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002), 124–229. For a detailed description of the expansion of Muscovy through 1800 refer to the aforementioned work by Michael Khordarkovsky.

<sup>20</sup> Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire*, 29.

perceived as being loyal to Moscow. Additionally, there was a heavy emphasis upon preserving local administrative structures, customs and practices with the express purpose of maintaining the status quo while supporting Moscow's legitimacy.<sup>21</sup> Chechen tribes would prove problematic, as there was no organic supra-tribal structure to subordinate, and when one did emerge, it did so as a reaction against Russia.

Islam proved to be an obstacle to complete integration of conquered peoples. Forced conversion to Christianity resumed in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century further inflaming ethnic relations.<sup>22</sup> It was likely demographic and military factors that forestalled significant rebellions during this time. Russian treatment of the peoples in its conquered lands would be a factor fresh in the minds of the North Caucasus tribes, especially the Chechens, even though many of the repressive efforts were reversed under Catherine the Great.

Revolts of the seventeenth century, underscored the continued security concerns throughout "integrated" lands, a situation, which would continue through the Europeanization efforts of Peter the Great, and more significantly, spur on Russian military efforts in the South. Moscow's efforts throughout the steppe, both punitive and conciliatory, were made possible by an extended period of interaction between groups. All the entities had a common frame of reference for their relationships, although the various sides may have perceived it differently. This common basis allowed the establishment of an imperfect equilibrium on the steppe. However, the common historical basis that allowed the successful integration of steppe societies was not present in the North Caucasus. The lack of compatible structures did not stop the expanding Russian empire from attempting to apply lessons of the steppe, to the control of the mountains.

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<sup>21</sup> Andreas Kappeler expands upon the details of Muscovite conquest and control of Kazan in the chapter "Gathering the Lands of the Golden Horde"; Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire* (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2001), 21–59.

<sup>22</sup> Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire*, 32.

### C. STATE AND NATION BUILDING IN THE COMPLEX LANDSCAPE OF THE CAUCASUS

Tensions between Russia and the two regional powers, Iran and the Ottoman Empire over control over the Caucasus and Black Sea eventually led to armed conflict.<sup>23</sup> As a result of direct conflict with Iran and an expanding security arrangement with Georgian leaders, Russia gained a military foothold in the southern half of the Caucasus range. Pavel Potemkin's efforts to secure the Russian military position in Georgia rested upon maintaining a secure ground line of communications. The ground line of communication would become the Georgian Military Highway, and remain a key aspect of Russia's southern security structure. Securing the Georgian Military Highway meant controlling the terrain to the east and west of the route and that meant bringing the mountain tribes to heel. Mountain fighting is extremely difficult even in modern times, but extended and exposed supply lines and a lack of both strategic and tactical mobility characteristic of eighteenth and nineteenth century warfare made fighting in the Caucasus particularly fraught with danger. It was this attempt to securing the route from Vladikavkaz to Tiflis that brought Russians into constant contact with Chechens.<sup>24</sup>

From the perspective of the European observer, Russian expansion into the Southern Caucasus smacked of colonialism. Russian leaders took a different stance regarding their conquest of the Caucasus as an expansion of Russia proper not the establishment of a colonial network.<sup>25</sup> Concurrent with the conquest of the southern slope of the Caucasus was an evolving concept of imperial citizenship.<sup>26</sup> Muslim Azeri and Christian Georgians were integrated into Greater Russia with relative

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<sup>23</sup> Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom*, 30-31. The Russo-Iranian War 1804–1813 and the Russo-Turkish War 1806–1812, provided Russia with control of much of the southern Caucasus, principally the territories of modern day Azerbaijan and Armenia. Additionally, much of what is modern Georgia was placed under Russian protection between 1803 and 1811.

<sup>24</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000: A Deadly Embrace*. (Portland, OR: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), 24–25.

<sup>25</sup> Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire*, 168–184.

<sup>26</sup> Dov Yaroshevski, "Empire and Citizenship," In *Russia's Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700–1917*, ed. Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzerini (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), 74–76.

ease. They possessed a readily identifiable national identity as well as having hierarchical national structures; both elements proved conducive to Russian integration methods.

From its early inception, the occupation of the Caucasus was one of the most complex undertakings of the Russian empire. The complexity arose from the sheer number of ethnicities and religions concurrently absorbed into the empire, exceeding those of the previous two centuries.<sup>27</sup>

Of primary concern to Russian leaders, was the integrity and safety of the Georgian Military Highway; development of a state among the tribes was ancillary. In the early stages of interaction Russian military leaders and viceroys tended to apply artificial social structures upon the mountain tribes, assuming that there must be some degree of centralization. As a result of their assumptions, the Russian attempted to identify and co-opt a series of charismatic local leaders under the belief, that each would be able to compel the remaining tribes into accepting Russian dominance.<sup>28</sup> The tactic was fundamentally flawed, there was no hierarchical political structure, and no one leader could force another's compliance.

Russian assumptions regarding the homogeneity of the mountain tribes do have a fundamental basis beyond the Russian desire for simplicity. Many of the mountain tribes shared "lifestyle, dress, spiritual beliefs and folk customs."<sup>29</sup> The outward appearance of commonality and the similarity of their homelands, likely led to an assumption of uniformity that was not actually present. While the rugged terrain appeared to isolate communities, there was some degree of interaction and exchange, but the result was far from establishing a supra-tribal political structure.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 24.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 32–35.

<sup>29</sup> Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom*, 34.

<sup>30</sup> Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom*, 12. Charles King describes the fluid relations among the mountain communities of the Caucasus painting the mountains and valleys as much less restrictive than one normally perceives.

Johann Anton Guldensadt, a Baltic German naturalist, conducted an extensive survey of the Caucasian populations. During the 1770s, he endeavored to describe and categorize the peoples in the region that would become Chechnya. Interestingly he was afforded little actual time in Chechen villages, because of a tenuous security situation arising from, "...the enmity of the Chechens toward Russia."<sup>31</sup> Guldensadt was able to characterize the typical social structure of the region. A typical village was small, consisting of no more than twenty homes. Each village was fortified with stone towers, affording both a position to fight from and cover for women and children.<sup>32</sup>

Economically, the village was engaged in various forms of subsistence farming and animal husbandry. Raiding was also an integral sector of the economy, and "...may have been the main business for some groups or individuals."<sup>33</sup> In the rugged terrain, raiding was a logical means of augmenting the village's production, to such an extent that neighboring villages were regularly raided. The constant threat of incursion resulted in a hyper-vigilant and thoroughly militarized society.<sup>34</sup> Fierce individualism and independence were coupled with the militarism throughout the mountain tribes.

In describing Chechen society, Michael Reynolds uses the phrase, "radically egalitarian."<sup>35</sup> This phrase seems appropriate, as each man was free to make his own decisions within the society's social structures. There was no aristocracy present among Chechen society. Chechen society idealized independence, drawing its identity out of notions of courage, freedom, and resistance. Each Chechen tribe was comprised of independent and militant freemen owing allegiance to only him and his family, such conditions within the tribes, was replicated among tribes. No one tribe could extract

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<sup>31</sup> Sean Pollock, "Empire by Invitation? Russian Empire-Building in the Caucasus in the Reign of Catherine II" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2006), 54.

<sup>32</sup> Sean Pollock, "Empire by Invitation? Russian Empire-Building in the Caucasus in the Reign of Catherine II," 55.

<sup>33</sup> Sean Pollock, "Empire by Invitation? Russian Empire-Building in the Caucasus in the Reign of Catherine II," 55.

<sup>34</sup> Sean Pollock, "Empire by Invitation? Russian Empire-Building in the Caucasus in the Reign of Catherine II," 56.

<sup>35</sup> Michael A. Reynolds, "Myths and Mysticism: Islam and Conflict in the North Caucasus: A Longitudinal Perspective," (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars: Keenan Institute, 2004), 7.

loyalty from another as the concept ran anathema to the very nature of Chechens.<sup>36</sup> Up to this point, the Chechen tribes were largely independent. A complex system of vendetta was the prime means of inter-tribal social conformity. Vendetta's were initiated between members of differing family groups, and more often than not were settled with some form of violence, although it was not uncommon for families to workout arrangements other than force.<sup>37</sup>

In response to an uncomfortable and alien social structure, the Russians chose to force an artificial construct they were able to understand. The structure preferred by imperial representatives was one that had a limited number of political powers, of which Russia could manipulate or threaten. In practice, this meant Russian representatives would pick a local leader and imbue him with imperial legitimacy and material support, while fomenting conflict with another group perceived as antagonistic to Russian objectives.<sup>38</sup> The whole process produced two effects; it intensified the imposition of externally defined notions of state, as well as focusing tribal aggression against Russia. It was through this artificial overlay that the Chechens were redefined as criminal.

#### **D. ISLAM AND REVENGE THE CEMENT OF THE PROTO-CHECHEN STATE**

The North Caucasus was among the first lands reached by Islam's initial expansion. As early as 642 AD, Muslim Arabs reached the city of Derbent in Dagestan. Despite the fervor of the invading Arabs, Caucasian resistance proved too formidable. Arab forces reoriented toward Tiflis, forgoing the conquest of Dagestan. Several years later, the conquest of Dagestan was attempted a second time, with an even more disastrous result.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Michael Reynolds, "Myth and Mysticism," 7.

<sup>37</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 29–33.

<sup>38</sup> Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom*, 38. Interestingly, this practice has continued to the present. The instillation and support of Ramzan Kadyrov provides an ideal example of the contemporary implementation of a 19<sup>th</sup> century practice.

<sup>39</sup> Michael A. Reynolds, "Myths and Mysticism," 2–3.

Resulting from these defeats, Arab Muslims were never able to gain a firm hold in Dagestan or the more remote and inhospitable area of Chechnya. The Arabs were able to conduct a limited number of successful punitive raids, in the process converting some Dagestani leader. These conversions would be the Arabs' legacy in the Caucasus, a region they considered to be populated by robbers and brigands.<sup>40</sup>

After the withdrawal of the preponderance of Arab forces in the region, the next major upheaval in the Caucasus involved the Mongols. After sweeping through the steppe, the Mongol armies turned toward that Caucasus. They were initially successful in off balancing the mountain tribes. However, fierce independence and rugged terrain were once again employed with great success. Mountain fighters were so successful in raiding, that the Mongols began to send regular emissaries to the mountain tribes with tribute in exchange for protection from raids.<sup>41</sup> In essence, the mountain tribes developed an early form of the protection racket employed by modern Chechen organized crime elements.

Mongol occupation did have lasting effects other than the development of early protection rackets. Mongols facilitated the spread of Islam, particularly among the Circassians. Arab influences in Dagestan and Mongol influences, among the Circassians, planted the seeds of Islam in the Caucasus. Acceptance of Islamic practices would take centuries to percolate through the mountain tribes. Even when Islam did become adopted, it was done with a superficial knowledge of the religion and its practices.<sup>42</sup>

Persian expeditions into Dagestan during the eighteenth century proved no more successful than previous conquests. Mountain tribes of the North Caucasus banded together in a series of alliances against the common foe. Adopting techniques that had proved successful against previous invaders the mountain tribes forced the withdrawal of Persian troops. During this period, Islam played a limited role in unifying the mountain

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<sup>40</sup> Michael A. Reynolds, "Myths and Mysticism," 3.

<sup>41</sup> Michael A. Reynolds, "Myths and Mysticism," 4.

<sup>42</sup> Michael A. Reynolds, "Myths and Mysticism," 4.



tribes, primarily because of the limited penetration into tribal society, and an even more limited understanding of the religion's major tenets.<sup>43</sup>

Despite the limited penetration of Islam through out the Caucasus, there were some local leaders who were beginning to see a political structure beyond the tribe. The spread of Sunni Islam was beginning to link concepts of religious practice, with the notion of a state. The *hadiths* and the Quran provided the source of such thoughts. In practice the merger was embodied in the sharia, a body of laws that proscribed the manner of social interactions. Within the sharia was the concept of, *dawlah*, an abstract of the state that served as "the enforcer of law."<sup>44</sup> The spread of Islam carried with it the concept of a supra-tribal state. It was this notion of state that would play an expanded role in the resistance efforts against Russian conquest of the Caucasus.<sup>45</sup>

Much of the literature regarding early resistance in the Caucasus is focused on the exploits of Imam Shamil. He led one of the longest and most successful resistance movements in the region gaining notoriety well beyond the region. However, Russian interaction with rebellious Chechens dates farther back. Drawing upon notions of a supra-tribal "state," Imam Mansur led an uprising of Avar and Chechen tribes against imperial forces.<sup>46</sup> Aided greatly by terrain and the call for a holy war against the Russians, Mansur defeated two Russian formations before his eventual defeat in 1790.

The interesting portion of Mansur's tale is not the defeat of a technologically superior force; rather it is that he identified the critical weakness of the mountain tribes. Mansur saw that only through a unifying construct would the tribes be able to resist Russian efforts.<sup>47</sup> Upon initial glance it would appear that Mansur's efforts fulfilled the Russian desire for a single political structure to co-opt or coerce. Mansur's rebellion did unify elements of the tribes, but only for a short period of time, directing their energy towards the Russian not each other. Mansur's rebellion identified the lack of systemic

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<sup>43</sup> Michael A. Reynolds, "Myths and Mysticism," 4–5.

<sup>44</sup> Michael A. Reynolds, "Myth and Mysticism," 5.

<sup>45</sup> Michael A. Reynolds, "Myth and Mysticism," 6.

<sup>46</sup> Michael A. Reynolds, "Myth and Mysticism," 7.

<sup>47</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 31.

cohesion among the Chechen tribes and the limited role Islam had in unifying the tribes. The two most significant remnants of Mansur's rebellion were the growing utility of Islam as a unifying force, and the awareness that unified the mountain tribes were a valid threat to Russian control of the region.

#### **E. THE RISE OF GRASSROOTS CHECHNYA: RUSSIAN MILITARISM AND CHECHEN RESISTANCE**

Russia success against Mansur was achieved through the overwhelming application of military force. Twenty-five thousand Russian regular troops assaulted Mansur's base of operations and captured the leader, carting him off to St. Petersburg, effectively ending his insurrection. However, pacifying the region was beyond the scope of a single raid. The liberal application of force would be a central aspect to subsequent Russian efforts. Russian military tactics applied in the Caucasus, during the nineteenth century were largely the product of two Russian generals: Aleksei Yermolov and A.A. Veliaminov.<sup>48</sup>

Both figures were products of the Napoleonic Wars and shared a similar set of experiences. However, they approached the situation in the Caucasus from different angles. Veliaminov saw the Caucasus as a career artillery officer would, viewing it as an immense fortification that needed to be systematically reduced.<sup>49</sup>

The Caucasus may be likened to a mighty fortress, marvelously strong by nature, artificially protected by military works, and defended by a numerous garrison. Only thoughtless men would attempt to scale such a stronghold. Wise commanders would see the necessity of having recourse to military art; would lay his parallels; advance by sap and mine; and so master the place. The Caucasus, in my opinion, must be treated in the same way.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 32. Yermolov and Veliaminov were products of the Napoleonic Wars having successfully commanded Russian forces against Napoleon. Yermolov and Veliaminov both viewed violence as an effective means of pacification in the Caucasus, where they differed was in their view of the ultimate target and rational for violence.

<sup>49</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 32–33.

<sup>50</sup> J. F. Baddeley, *The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus*, (London: Longmans, Green & Company, 1908), 112. Quoted in Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 33.

This systematic, almost geometric vision, of reducing the Caucasus fortification might appear to be an early ‘hearts and mind’ campaign; in reality, it was far from that. Veliaminov envisioned his plan advancing upon the back of targeted violence and terrorism. The violence would be facilitated by a constricting band of fortifications. From these forts, Russian forces would destroy villages, burn crops and drive off the population. Captured lands would then be redistributed to loyal subjects, often time Cossack settlers. The ultimate goal was to sap the ability of Chechen, and other tribes, to resist Russian rule, while building a buffer of reliable people.<sup>51</sup>

Yermolov, acting and the first imperial viceroy to the Caucasus, provided another conceptual framework for Russian actions in the Caucasus. His view was that of complete Russification of the Caucasus, devoid of independent or autonomous ethnic states.<sup>52</sup> However, in execution Yermolov favored solely military means without any effort to co-opt the mountain tribes. His strategy appeared to rely only upon widespread violence, with the goal of instilling total fear within the Chechens and other mountain, tribes so that further resistance would be unthinkable. Yermolov was quoted as saying, “I desire that the terror of my name shall guard our frontiers more potently than chains of fortresses.”<sup>53</sup> His concept was placed into practice following the establishment of Fortress Grozny in 1819, and continued for several campaign seasons before his relief.<sup>54</sup>

It is not entirely surprising that the Chechens responded to the violence, not with submission, but with rebellion. Up to this point the Chechen tribes were largely independent and had responded to previous foreign incursions with violent resistance. Their decentralized social structure made coercion difficult and capitulation to anyone especially a foreigner was unthinkable.<sup>55</sup> The seemingly random relations between

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<sup>51</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 33.

<sup>52</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 33.

<sup>53</sup> Lesley Blanch, *Sabers of Paradise* (London: John Murray, 1960), 24, Quoted in Robert Seely, *The Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 34.

<sup>54</sup> For a more detailed overview of the tactics employed by Yermolov refer to Robert Seely’s work *Russo-Chechen Conflict*. Seely has drawn his analysis of the early Russian efforts against the Chechens from a myriad of credible sources, all of which report violent excesses conducted by Russian troops.

<sup>55</sup> Michael A. Reynolds, “Myth and Mysticism,” 7.

Chechen tribes flummoxed Russian military leaders, when they occasioned to consider the relations at all. More often, the Russians operated from a position of cultural ignorance owing to a lack of allies among the mountain tribes and a deficit of linguistic capacity. The flexible and nuanced forms of state making and subversion used by Muscovy in its path to consolidation of the steppe were not used in the mountains, nor could they be. The egalitarian social structure, with its system of vendetta, relied heavily upon negotiations and a keen understanding of cultural motivators and the local languages, which the Russians noticeably lacked. From the beginning, the Russian efforts left the Chechens with a single recourse, violence; which when violently resisted confirmed Russian beliefs regarding the viability of a Chechen vassal state.

Russian brutality and Sufi Islam provided the necessary foundation for the formation of a proto-Chechen state. Imam Shamil provided the catalyst needed to unite the Chechens. Shamil was not the first to attempt to unite the various mountain tribes, Imam Mansur had done a similar act the previous century, and Ghazi Mohammad, another Islamic leader, had attempted it in the early 1800s. Shamil succeeded where others had failed. While alive, he managed to build a mythology around himself. Several near death experiences, as well as his religious discipline and martial prowess aided him in this task. Shamil further refined his myth, through careful cultivation of his image as a leader.<sup>56</sup> The first Chechen state-like structure, above the village level, was a product of Shamil's leadership and ability to manipulate Chechen hatred of Russian military actions and the tenets of Islam.

The question faced by Shamil was how to formalize the federation of Avar and Chechen tribes. Islam provided a contextual structure for government and he provided the leadership, but there was still a problem of putting theory into practice. It is often forgotten that Shamil's rise to prominence in Chechnya was not an easy process. Shamil solidified his position around, 1834, putting into place the final elements of the proto-state with the establishment of a standing military force. Through a combination of incentives and personal charisma, Shamil bound the combatants to himself instead of the

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<sup>56</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 41.

village leaders. Personal loyalty allowed Shamil to fight beyond the bounds of village territories, creating a more flexible and capable force. Like all states, Shamil faced the problem of how to maintain both a credible military and the necessary administrative structures.<sup>57</sup>

Shamil solved these problems by establishing an administration comprised of secular and religious leaders. At the village level, the secular and religious leaders ruled in tandem, and were obliged to provide 300 horsemen loyal to Shamil.<sup>58</sup> One can realistically expect that the loyalty of the 300 horsemen remained split between Shamil and the traditional familiar structures. On the whole their loyalty to Shamil was much more firmly planted than the Russian conscripts was to the Tsar. Shamil went beyond establishing village leadership; he then linked the villages into provinces with concomitant military obligations.<sup>59</sup> It was the linking of village entities into provinces where Chechnya took its first steps beyond a solely tribal government.

Shamil's efforts were not only limited to the martial realm, he organized a nascent postal service. While the postal service was most likely used for primarily military means, it could be employed to address other communications needs of the local and provincial leadership. Furthermore, Shamil implemented a rudimentary legal system based upon sharia law. Implementation of the legal system was tied to Shamil's travels. Reports indicate that as Shamil traveled through the mountains he had among his entourage an executioner, with a "long handled ax for swift decapitations."<sup>60</sup> During the 1840s and 1850s a growing Chechen state was fashioned around the visions of Shamil, it drew in Christians and Muslims alike and resulted in the continuation of local resistance to Russian military conquest.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom*, 78; Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 45.

<sup>58</sup> Moritz Wagner, *Travels in Persia, Georgia and Koordistan* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1856), 127 Quoted in Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 45.

<sup>59</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 45–46.

<sup>60</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 46.

<sup>61</sup> Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom*, 81.

Chechnya's first attempts at a supra-tribal government effectively ended before Shamil's surrender in 1859. The structure had never become institutionalized, and relied completely on Shamil's personal charisma. As the conflict played out the system of administration eroded and traditional tribal structures and inter-tribal competition replaced Shamil's leadership. It was not only a resurgence of the more basic motivators of the Chechen people; Russia attempts at co-opting anti-Shamil elements were also a significant factor.<sup>62</sup>

Following Shamil's surrender, Tsar Alexander promised a number of privileges to the Chechens, including relief from taxation and conscription, as well as the use of local legal practices.<sup>63</sup> Ostensibly, this might appear as at least a nod by the tsar towards autonomy under Russian rule. However, it was more likely a case of the lack of capacity to affect full subjugation of the Chechen highlands. Additionally, during the period of imperial benefits, the Russian military undertook an extensive relocation program within controlled territories. Chechens, among other populations were resettled as a means of preventing future rebellion, or at least the local support of rebels.<sup>64</sup> The relocations did not prevent a series of rebellions that continued until the fall of the Russian Empire.

## **F. SOVIET CHECHNYA**

Social and political tension had been building in Russia during the final decades of the nineteenth century and the first of the twentieth century. While Alexander II officially eliminated serfdom in 1861, the conditions of rural Russians did not improve.<sup>65</sup> In many parts of Russia, rural populations were in effect still tied to the land and oppressed by the tsarist government. Social programs undertaken by Alexander II, did little to calm the unrest or mitigate the inequality, and were essentially negated by Alexander III's repressions.<sup>66</sup> Limited self-government and an equally limited

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<sup>62</sup> Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom*, 88–92.

<sup>63</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 60.

<sup>64</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 60–61.

<sup>65</sup> Carmi Schooler, "Serfdom's Legacy: An Ethnic Continuum" *American Journal of Sociology* 81 (1976): 1267

<sup>66</sup> Richard Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 302–305.

parliament did little to offset the police state in effect changing Russia very little throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>67</sup> Tsar Nicholas II assumed power under the shadow of growing social tension.

Tsarist Russia entered into World War I, with the memory of a recent defeat to the Japanese still painfully vivid. In 1914, the opportunity of a great social cleansing appealed as much too Russian aristocracy as it did throughout the rest of Europe. On the eve of war, Russia saw the possibility of expanding its territory and influence into southeastern Europe. What came out of the war was a sort of social cleansing, but not of the type initially envisioned.

As the war raged on, fighting along the Eastern Front intensified. Russian troops were suffering considerable casualties as German offensives continued. By 1917, the Russian army had mobilized nearly 15 million men and had suffered 1.6 million killed in action, two million wounded and an additional two million captured. The strain of extended high intensity combat had brought the social and economic conditions in the country to a crescendo. Nicholas II assumed direct command of the military early in the conflict. He was able to maintain the cohesion of the government only as long as the military remained successful. However, as the military and social conditions deteriorated discord within the government grew. Nicholas II abdicated his throne, and his government evaporated.<sup>68</sup>

A provisional government assumed nominal power but was hampered by infighting and subterfuge. In addition to the political infighting the war with Germany continued, but would be fought with a dwindling military and even less political leadership. Military defeats continued and eventually led to the fragmentation of the provisional government. It was at this point that Lenin's Bolsheviks were able to assume a significant role in the Russian political scene.<sup>69</sup> Lenin called for a nationwide election

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<sup>67</sup> Ivan T. Berend, *History Derailed: Central and Eastern Europe in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 254.

<sup>68</sup> Bernard Wasserstein, *Barbarism & Civilization: A History of Europe in Our Time* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 80–83.

<sup>69</sup> Bernard Wasserstein, *Barbarism & Civilization*, 85–86.

for the Constituent Assembly, of which the Bolsheviks fared less well than the Social Revolutionaries. As a means of rectifying the election results, Lenin with the support of loyal military members disbanded the Assembly, stating that represented a “step backward” for the workers revolution.<sup>70</sup>

Assuming control of what remained of the government; Lenin was able to negotiate a treaty, although on unequal terms, with the Germans. Russia lost a considerable portion of its population and industrial base, plunging the remainder of the country into an even deeper abyss. The dissolution of the Constituent Assembly did not convey control of the country to the Bolsheviks; in fact it opened the door for a violent civil war. Bolsheviks, with the support of much of the military, fought against elements of the Social Revolutionaries and pro-tsarist White Russians. Throughout the civil war, Bolsheviks made a series of tactical alliances and promises that would be discarded upon consolidation of their control over the country. The Caucasus was no exception to this process.

The Soviets renewed their assault on the Caucasus drawing upon various interpretation of Marxist theory, regarding a sequential progress through nationalism to communism. At the core of the Soviet effort was the attempt to impose a national structure upon the tribal Chechens. The national structure the Soviets chose was grounded in their perception of the ethnic composition of the region. Ethnic restructuring would remain a facet of future Soviet undertakings in the Caucasus, and would have an effect upon the character of the government structures, as well as that of the Chechen identity. However, before the Soviets could restructure national territories in the Caucasus they needed to regain control of the region.

## **G. CONTROL OF THE CAUCASUS**

The process of re-establishing control over the Caucasus was entwined with the progress of the civil war, and in doing so the Soviets took a page from the tsarist playbook but with a Bolshevik flair. Bolsheviks established temporary alliances with

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<sup>70</sup> Bernard Wasserstein, *Barbarism & Civilization*, 90.



local elites in an effort to undermine regional competitors. At this time the Chechen elites comprised a mixture of tribal leaders and the local intellectuals, both groups were drawn into alliances with the Bolsheviks under a belief that it was a short-term beneficial arrangement, which would end with Chechen sovereignty.

The early years of the Russian Revolution were chaotic, but few areas were as chaotic as the North Caucasus. At least five separate entities had declared legitimate authority over the region and each conducted extensive military efforts to consolidate their power.<sup>71</sup>

Under the leadership of a wealthy Chechen industrialist, Tapa Chermoev the Union of Mountain Peoples was founded. The union was founded in Vladikavkaz in 1917, with the intention of forming an autonomous state within a Russian framework.<sup>72</sup> Chermoev's Union was an inclusive organization, attempting to blend Chechen nationalism with that of other ethnicities in the North Caucasus. In theory this broad base should have strengthened the movement but that was not the case. Chermoev's Union faced a string of military defeats, and within months of its inception the Union was driven from the Caucasus to Batum never to return.<sup>73</sup>

There was another Chechen party who saw civil war as an opportune time to declare independence. In 1918, two Chechen Sufi leaders, Ali Akushinski Gotsinskii and Sheikh Uzun Haji, established the North Caucasus Emirate. They must have thought the Bolshevik regime, with its anti-imperial rhetoric, would be supportive of their theocracy. This assumption proved to be a strategic mistake. Upon the defeat of General Denikin, the Bolsheviks terminated the alliance and turned upon their previous allies. Gotsinskii's forces were disbanded, but were not driven from region. Despite the scattering of Gotsinskii's forces, the Bolsheviks were unable to eradicate an urge for an Islamic

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<sup>71</sup> Ben Fowkes, introduction to *Russia and Chechnia: The Permanent Crisis*, ed. Ben Fowkes (New York: St. Martins Press, Inc, 1998). At the core of the conflict were military and political elements from Chechen liberal nationalists, mountain Chechens and Ingush, Cossacks, White Russians (under General Denikin) and the Bolsheviks. Between 1917 and 1921 these five elements would construct, undermine and reconstruct a dizzying array of tactical alliances.

<sup>72</sup> Ben Fowkes, *Russia and Chechnia: The Permanent Crisis*, 5.

<sup>73</sup> Ben Fowkes, *Russia and Chechnia: The Permanent Crisis*, 6.

Chechnya and would have to deal with Gotsinskii again in late 1920. This time, Gotsinskii rallied his followers under the call for ‘national liberation’ and ‘a sharia-state’.<sup>74</sup> A grassroots, religious state was not what the Soviets had in mind and in a theme that would continue until the present day, religiously based Chechen governments would be viewed as a threat. Moscow’s response to such a threat tended to be military in character followed with the imposition of an artificial government structure.

Like previous attempts at establishing an Islamic state, Gotsinskii’s North Caucasian Emirate, was branded a criminal entity and a threat. Resistance to Bolshevik control of the Caucasus was dealt with by harsh military retaliation. By 1925, when the Red Army had largely put down most active resistance, Chechnya had been laid to waste. Nearly one hundred villages had been destroyed, the population was reduced to near starvation and in such dire economic straits that many were forced to wear pelts for clothing. It is not surprising that many Chechens perceived this period to be a second imperial conquest and subsequently developed a deep mistrust of Soviet policies there after.<sup>75</sup>

## **H. INITIAL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES AND TERRITORIAL ADJUSTMENTS**

Early Soviet policies in Chechnya were an extension of imperial policies, interwoven with Soviet philosophy, and lessons learned during their own attempts at control of the mountains. Imperial policies towards the emerging ethnic nationalities were transferred to the new Soviet state through a stable of Russian ethnographic experts.<sup>76</sup> Chechen territory was redefined several times during the 1920s and 1930s by Moscow, in order to establish the most advantageous mix of terrain and population. Chechnya originated from the earlier Dagestan and Mountain Autonomous Socialist

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<sup>74</sup> Ben Fowkes, *Russia and Chechnia: The Permanent Crisis*, 7.

<sup>75</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 77.

<sup>76</sup> Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 64–65. In this work Francine Hirsch details the influence of ethnographic knowledge on the formation of the Soviet Union, stressing that contrary to the popular conception the Soviet nationalities policy was an iterative, trial and error system. Soviet leaders did not have complete knowledge of the ethnic groups within their claimed territory and as such had to approach managing them from a knowledge deficit.

Soviet Republics (ASSRs), an organization designed to unite Caucasus groups in a common support for the Soviets. The regional support expected by the Soviets never materialized, instead local communities continued to resist Moscow's control. In an effort to divide recalcitrant populations the Mountain ASSRs were subdivided, and Chechnya was granted oblast status in 1922.<sup>77</sup>

Soviet inclusion of local customs in governance was largely a show. It allowed time for Moscow and the Red Army to strengthen their position relative to the threats. In the case of Chechnya this included identifying local pro-Soviet Chechens, re-drawing the borders, and adjusting the demographics of the territory. Locating pro-Soviet Chechens proved to be difficult, as mentioned above even though quotas in the local government structures were increased for those of titular nationalities, there was never enough interested or qualified Chechens.<sup>78</sup>

Through the 1920s and 1930s, the entire North Caucasus went through a process of redistricting that resembled a large game of musical homelands.<sup>79</sup> The Chechens got their own oblast in 1922, while the Ingush received oblast status in 1924 along with a series of other territories. In 1935, Chechnya and Ingushetia were merged into a single oblast and in 1936 the oblast was transformed to an autonomous republic. Redistricting was a fairly easy process on the part of the Soviets, and was largely undertaken for show.<sup>80</sup>

In addition to establishing a territorial division, the Soviets attempted to bring non-Russians into the party establishment to carry out party objectives. Integrating locals into the governments was a two-pronged process originating out of the earlier Soviet nationalities policy. The process involved promoting national elites and national languages, both processes would be merged and referred to as *korenizatsii*. Lenin and

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<sup>77</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 77.

<sup>78</sup> Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 172.

<sup>79</sup> The analogy of musical homelands came from Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict*, 77.

<sup>80</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict*, 77.

Stalin viewed the process as a means to an end, with the end being increased control of the territory by the Party. Both felt that, *korenizatsii*, would make the process feel more ‘native.’<sup>81</sup>

Like most other efforts at state building in the Soviet Union, this process was initiated from Moscow, and applied throughout the entire union with little regard for regional differences. Unfortunately, what worked in western Russia would not necessarily work in Chechnya. Qualified non-ethnic workers were indiscriminately replaced, often times with less qualified locals.<sup>82</sup> In Chechnya this arbitrary practice proved to be difficult, there had always been difficulties finding Chechens to participate as such in the early years of the various Chechen republics Russians or other non-Chechens filled most of the positions.<sup>83</sup>

Soviet efforts at manipulating the make-up of regional governments failed to significantly increase non-Russian participation. This was particularly true in the case of Chechnya, where Chechen participation in government steadily decreased through the 1930s.<sup>84</sup> The net effect of the Soviet efforts inhibited Chechens from playing a significant role in the nominally Chechen government. This Chechen government would last until the entire population was sent into exile on 23 February 1944.

## **I. THE AMAZING REAPPEARING CHECHEN REPUBLIC**

From 23 February 1943 until 1956 there was no Chechen republic, and when it finally reappeared in the wake of Khrushchev’s “secret speech,” it only vaguely resembled its previous form. The border had been shifted farther to the north in order to include a large Russian population. The shift of the border had a very obvious purpose, to further marginalize any returning Chechen population. In addition to this

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<sup>81</sup> Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 172.

<sup>82</sup> Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*, 125–146.

<sup>83</sup> Ocherki istorii Checheno-Ingushskoi ASSR, vol 2 (Grozny: Chehceno-Ingushkoe Knizhnoe Isdatel'stvo, 1972) 82, quoted in *Russia and Chechnia: The Permanent Crisis*, ed. Ben Fowkes (New York: St. Martins Press, Inc, 1998), 8.

<sup>84</sup> Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations*, 173.

demographic manipulation, the Soviet government all but excluded Chechens from anything but the lower levels of the political system, gone were the days of the “affirmative action empire.”<sup>85</sup>

Chechens had return to a Chechnya that needed no Chechen leadership. It was not until 1989, that a Chechen was allowed to lead the republics Party organization. They were excluded from any substantial position not only in the government, but also throughout society. There was no influential Chechen position in the regions petroleum industry, partly because of low education levels, but also from more deliberate exclusionary practices.<sup>86</sup> These factors resulted in another dispersion of the Chechen population, this time for economic reasons.

While the period from 1960 to the fall of the Soviet Union, was the most peaceful years the Chechens had known in the twentieth century, they were critical in setting the conditions for the future criminalized state. During this period, Chechens continued to be largely excluded from anything but the lowest levels of industry and government. However, they were able to survive because they continued to develop strong non-traditional governance structures, ones that reached back to religious and tribal predecessors and had assumed a growing criminal nature. The Chechens were able to extend their familial networks throughout the Soviet Union. This would be a critical asset in forming and sustaining a nascent independent Chechnya.

In late 1990s, the most significant event in Chechen politics occurred. The previously amorphous Chechen political networks solidified. They took the form of the All-National Congress of Chechen Peoples (OKChN) and were led by a Chechen businessman from Moscow, the head of the Chechen construction department and a Chechen poet.<sup>87</sup> How these three individuals united is unknown, but it was likely

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<sup>85</sup> The term “affirmative action empire” was applied to the early Soviet Union by Terry Martin in his book *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939*.

<sup>86</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 87.

<sup>87</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 90.

through a combination of ethnic and business connections. It is also fairly likely that these relationships were of an extra-legal nature, as the Soviet Union was still only experimenting with capitalist structures.

What motivated the leaders of the OKChN to unite? Was it love of country and countrymen? Was it a desire for a Jeffersonian democracy? Or was it something more tangible like the potential personal financial gains to be had in a collapsing empire? OKChN leadership looked for a figurehead, someone that could rally the population with images of historic Chechen heroes. They found Major General Djohar Musayevich Dudayev. Dudayev, the only Chechen to reach the rank of General in the Soviet military had also played a role in the Estonian independence movement by stating he would deny Soviet troops from entering Estonian airspace.<sup>88</sup> Aside from the outward leadership traits the OKChN saw a man who could be molded to their needs, and on that account they were correct. Dudayev became increasingly reliant on corrupted state officials and criminals, most of which supported his efforts at independence out of self-interest. This was the beginning of the outright criminalization of the Chechen government, a criminalization that continues today and continues to threaten the security of the region.

## **J. CONCLUSION**

Chechnya in its many incarnations has never managed to become a true nation-state in the modern context. As a political organization it has made quantum leaps in form and substance of its political structures, all of which have been spurred by external stimuli. Untouched for centuries, the Chechens were essentially unchanged. They existed in a society of near complete anarchy, living in small tribal communities and subsisting on a combination of agriculture and raiding. In this environment independence was not only prized it was critical for survival. The same independence that would cause tribes to fight each other would serve to unite them all against outside invaders.

It was the prolonged interaction with the Russians that produced the first radical change in the concept of a collective Checheness. Contact with the Russians was not the

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<sup>88</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 92.

main reason for this change; instead, it was the character of the contact. Russian imperial expansion and rule had been shaped by centuries of interaction with, and rule over, an ever-expanding multi-ethnic state. This had produced an eclectic system of rules, none of which fit the Chechen situation.

Simultaneous with the arrival of Russia was the emergence of a more developed and expansive concept of Islam. Islam had made slow inroads into Chechnya owing to the general tendency to resist any outside force. However, it had permeated to a sufficient degree during the nineteenth century that it served as a unifying force for Chechens. In addition to an emotional call to arms, Sufi Islam provided a structure for a supra-tribal government along with the concept of a greater community.

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### **III. THE PATH TOWARDS CRIMINALITY: CRIMINALIZATION OF THE CHECHEN IDENTITY**

In the previous chapter, we looked at the factors involved in the various attempts at building an independent and semi-independent Chechen state. Much of the focus of state formation involved the interplay between an artificial structure imposed from Moscow and the grassroots governmental structures generated by the Chechens themselves. The formation of a universal Chechen identity will be framed in a similar structure, contrasting an external perception of a Chechen identity with the Chechen's view of self. Perception plays a critical element in the discussion of identity, as the perception of a single event will naturally vary depending upon the observer's point of view; one man's hero is another man's criminal or terrorist. Over the course of two centuries Chechen and Russian views of each other have been shaped by thousands of separate events.

The criminalization of the Chechen identity did not happen in a single cataclysmic instant; instead, it was an evolutionary process. Criminalization was the result of two opposing forces, one directed from Moscow the other originated from the Caucasus. Undergirding both was a clash of interests between security concerns of iterative Russian states and the desire for independence and continuity among the Chechens. The manner by which the Russian, then Soviets, imposed their control over the Chechens produced a violent resistance by the Chechen population. Population politics, as it developed during the nineteenth century added to the violence of the Russian and Soviet policies in Chechnya, providing a pseudo-scientific basis for the criminalization of entire sections of the population. Fierce independence has always characterized the Chechen tribes. Instances where outside forces encroach on Chechen territory have always been met with resistance by an alliance of Chechen tribes. Over several centuries, the resistance became more violent and the cohesion among the tribes became more enduring.

Throughout the process of resistance, there were four critical factors responsible the unification and criminalization of the Chechen identity: the spread of Sufi Islam through the Chechen tribes, nineteenth century Russian romantic literature, Shamil's

resistance and the deportation. Islam provided the Chechens the concept of, *dawlah*, a community beyond the tribe. By the nineteenth century the tenets of Islam were internalized enough to augment the perception of Russian threat and bind the various Chechen tribes together. Sufi Islam would become a key component of the Chechen identity, one that separated them from the Russians and Soviets.<sup>89</sup>

At roughly the same time Sufi Islam was increasing in importance as an element of the Chechen identity, Russian authors were creating their own version of the typical Chechen. Lermontov, Pushkin, and Tolstoy created an image of an idealized North Caucasus among the social and political elites of the era. All three merged their personal experiences in the Caucasus with a romantic perception of the people and terrain to create an enduring myth. Criminality was integral to the myth all three authors created.

Imam Shamil's prolonged resistance provided the tangible evidence of the fierce and intractable nature of the Chechen tribes. Both Russian/Soviet elites and the Chechen community would continuously reframe Shamil's endeavors. Shamil provided a figure to focus Chechen identity, particularly in its struggle against Moscow. Similarly, tsarist and then Soviet leaders used the image of Shamil for their purposes, either as a hero or a criminal.<sup>90</sup>

The three initial factors provided the foundation for the development of a common Chechen identity and its criminalization. It was the 1944 Deportation that crystalized and criminalized the Chechen identity. The mass exile fused the Chechens together through shared adversity and established the Soviet authorities as the common enemy. Life in exile deepened the connection among Chechens while alienating them from the developing Soviet society. It was the criminalization and alienation from society that facilitated the development of Chechen organized criminal elements.

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<sup>89</sup> Michael A. Reynolds, "Myths and Mysticism," 5.

<sup>90</sup> Bulent Gokay, "The Longstanding Russian and Soviet Debate over Sheik Shamil: Anti-Imperialist Hero or Counter-Revolutionary Cleric?" in Ben Fowkes ed. *Russia and Chechnia: The Permanent Crisis* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 25–64.

## A. BANDITRY AND THE STATE

The concepts of crime and criminality are central to the theme of this chapter. If we are to argue that the criminalization of the Chechen identity has played a role in the development of uniquely Chechen organized crime elements and these organizations have in turn played a role in the evolution and formation of the Chechen state, it benefits us to define some concepts. Crime is a social and political process and requires an understanding of the historical and social context in which it develops. Throughout the twentieth century criminologists have been working on the link between crime, society and governmental forces, gradually taking a more holistic view of the phenomenon.<sup>91</sup> Theoretical constructs of crime and state-making are also significant to the Chechen example, as criminalization of the Chechens resulted from their resistance to the expansion of the Russian then Soviet states.

Of particular relevance, are the discussions of banditry by Eric Hobsbawm and Anton Blok. Many of the elements present in Hobsbawm and Blok's theories are present in the Russo-Chechen relationship. Most obvious is the description of early Russians, such as Yermolov, who likened the Chechens to bandits. More significantly is the struggle to consolidate legitimate control over Chechnya and the Chechens. For Hobsbawm criminality could only be understood within the context of a central power's attempt to extend its control to the territorial periphery.<sup>92</sup>

Banditry can assume various forms depending upon the environmental and social situation where it originates. Despite the possible differences, there are some similar root sources of banditry. The process of exerting control is one such commonality. At the end of this struggle, one entity emerges in a dominant position and thereby defines the bounds of acceptable society.<sup>93</sup> Banditry emerges out of the struggle and the redefined social order.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Alan A. Block and William J. Chambliss, *Organizing Crime* (New York: Elsevier Science Publishing, 1981), 2–3.

<sup>92</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 11

<sup>93</sup> Charles Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," in Peter Evans, et. al., eds., *Bringing the State Back In*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 174.

<sup>94</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 8–12.

Control over a territory can refer to a range of things, but at its essence is the ability to control the legitimate use of violence.<sup>95</sup> This struggle for monopoly of the legitimate use of violence in Chechnya occurred several times during the Russo-Chechen relationship: first during the early rebellions, then during the 1920s, and finally during the latest two Russo-Chechen Wars. Each time it was the side that was able to “purvey violence on a larger scale, more effectively...and with readier collaboration from neighbor” who was able to define the extent of criminality.<sup>96</sup> In nearly all cases Moscow and St. Petersburg were able to monopolize violence in the degree necessary to control Chechnya.

Hobsbawm identifies several traits common to bandits. Bandits are generally from the fringes of society, most often from rural communities with a surplus of labor.<sup>97</sup> An integral portion of Hobsbawm’s concept is the presence of class tension. This is related to the development of his concept of social banditry, whereby banditry is used to right social wrongs from within a society.<sup>98</sup> Resulting from a narrow definition of social banditry, raiding tribes, such as the Chechens, only receive a limited consideration, a point that Anton Blok readily identifies.<sup>99</sup> Chechen criminality cannot be analyzed in isolation, as it is directly tied to the Russo-Chechen relationship. When viewed in this capacity, the possibility of Chechen social banditry is increased. The Chechens did engage in banditry as both a means of survival and to punish Russian, and later Soviet, oppression.

State-making relies heavily upon coercion, specifically, the monopoly upon the legitimate use of violence. Inherent to this concept are two aspects, the capacity to monopolize violence and the perception of legitimacy over the designated territory. Charles Tilly constructed an analogy between the state-making and an organized crime

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<sup>95</sup> Charles Tilly, “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime,” 174.

<sup>96</sup> Charles Tilly, “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime,” 174.

<sup>97</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 35.

<sup>98</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 19–33.

<sup>99</sup> Anton Blok, “The Peasant and the Brigand: Social Banditry Reconsidered” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 14 (1972): 496–497.

protection racket.<sup>100</sup> Tilly developed his theoretical structure to explain the process of state consolidation in Western Europe. While the conditions in Chechnya over the past 200-years are significantly different from sixteenth century Europe there are important parallels. Throughout the Russo-Chechen relationship there was a struggle over control of a territory, its people and resources.<sup>101</sup>

In both situations, the conflict was played out largely through the use of armed elements in an effort to subdue rivals and cow the population. The interaction of these armed elements that provided a tangible perception of criminality to the relationship. From the Russian/Soviet perspective the Chechens were violating the sovereign's authority.

Interwoven in the struggle for control is the notion of freedom. For Hobsbawm, banditry in all its forms is also about freedom.<sup>102</sup> Freedom in this context primarily deals with the absence of control from a centralized power, not simply the ability to go where one pleases but to do what one wants. Chechens have always placed a particular emphasis on freedom.<sup>103</sup> The desire for freedom and independence would remain a contributing factor to the Chechens criminalization, as elements of the Chechen population would continuously resist control from Russian and Soviet governments.

## **B. POPULATION POLITICS: EXTRACTING THE TROUBLESOME “ELEMENTS”**

Throughout the initial stages of sustained interaction with the Chechen tribes, historic pattern of imperial management were employed. Such methods focused on co-opting key leaders within the tribes, by integrating them into the Russian imperial structure. Those who could not be co-opted would be vigorously pursued by military means. Because of the varieties of cultures and size of the empire, Russian policies were not uniform. Policies directed toward the Polish populations varied considerably from

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<sup>100</sup> Charles Tilly, “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime,” 169–170.

<sup>101</sup> Charles Tilly, “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime,” 170–173.

<sup>102</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 34.

<sup>103</sup> Michael A. Reynolds, “Myths and Mysticism,” 7.

those used to manage Central Asian populations.<sup>104</sup> Russian policies toward the North Caucasus were no different; in fact, they may have been even more varied because of the number of cultures present.

Russian policies toward the imperial fringes began to change during the nineteenth century. Loyalty to the tsar was still a major consideration in the imperial assessment of its subjects, but developments in scientific and political thought were growing in importance. Nationalism among ethnic groups throughout Western Europe was beginning to concern the Russian leaders, since they were attempting to manage the largest multi-ethnic empire in the world. Most concerning was the threat ethno-nationalism posed to the Russian feudal structure.<sup>105</sup>

These concerns were compounded by a growing deficit in Russia's industrial base. While one of the largest economies of the nineteenth century, Russia was primarily an agrarian economy.<sup>106</sup> What Russia possessed in terms of industry was located in its western most regions and in need of modernization. Expansion of the economy was seen to be achievable through the application of modern scientific practices. In addition to the modernization of the Russian industrial base, the tsarist government undertook a massive expansion of its internal rail system. The growth of the rail system had two purposes, to promote the economy and facilitate internal security.<sup>107</sup>

Managing a multi-ethnic empire was also deemed possible through the application of scientific methods. As a remedy for many of the demographic and social issues the Russians applied emerging scientific principles to understanding, and then isolating harmful elements of society. Much of the theories that drove Russian, and later Soviet, policies were based on the nineteenth century understanding of population politics.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire*, 247.

<sup>105</sup> Andreas Kappeler, *The Russian Empire*, 247.

<sup>106</sup> Ivan T. Berend, *History Derailed*, 139.

<sup>107</sup> Ivan T. Berend, *History Derailed*, 152.

<sup>108</sup> Peter Holquist, "To Count, To Extract, and to Exterminate: Population Statistics and Population Politics in Late Imperial and Soviet Russia" in *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 111–112.

Population politics at its essence was the process of scientifically analyzing the population in an effort to identify social malignancies, and the process by which the government could intervene with a solution. The process as a whole was a merger of the new fields of anthropology, criminology, economics, and statistics. It sought to modify the relationship between the individual and society writ large. It is this new view of the relationship that is most significant for the Russo-Chechen relationship. Mainly, because of the growing belief that society, like the body, is composed of distinct elements and that dangerous ones can be identified and extracted in order to make the remaining elements stronger.<sup>109</sup>

Russians seized upon the notion of population politics, and its pre-cursor military statistics, early in the nineteenth century; by mid-century, the Russian General Staff had put the theory into practice.<sup>110</sup> It was Dmitrii Miliutin, who extended military statistics to the formal education arena, making it one of the core fields of study for the General Staff Academy.<sup>111</sup> Throughout the century, it was military officers and imperial administrators who continued to refine the practical application of military statistics, representing the multitude of ethnicities present in the Russian empire with a series of population categories.<sup>112</sup> For many of these practicing statisticians a large part of their effort was spent focused on Russia's southern border and the ongoing Chechen insurgency.

Population politics was not isolated to tsarist Russia; its tenets were passed along to Soviet military and political leaders. Soviet military leaders continued to carry the baton of training subsequent generations in the theory and application of military statistics, thereby enabling a continuation of population politics. Soviet leaders expressed their opinion regarding the importance of statistics in 1920 stating statistics, "were a tool for governing and organizing the state."<sup>113</sup> The end goal of population politics remained

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<sup>109</sup> Peter Holquist, "To Count, To Extract, and to Exterminate," 111

<sup>110</sup> Peter Holquist, "To Count, To Extract, and to Exterminate," 114

<sup>111</sup> Peter Holquist, "To Count, To Extract, and to Exterminate," 114

<sup>112</sup> Peter Holquist, "To Count, To Extract, and to Exterminate," 114

<sup>113</sup> Peter Holquist, "To Count, To Extract, and to Exterminate," 112

the same, stability; it was the method of categorizing that was modified under the Soviets. Soviet leaders now defined elements as anti-revolutionary rather than the cause of a social illness.<sup>114</sup>

The notion of “elements” within society permeated Soviet thought to the point that it became a main stay within the common discourse.<sup>115</sup> Soviet military and security agencies spoke in terms of elements within the population that were the sources of security concerns. However, depending upon the given time and region what constituted a given “element” was subject to change. Interestingly the label of “bandit” was applied nearly universally to those elements deemed to be malignant. Increasing use of this label began during the civil war but has continued to be used today<sup>116</sup>

### C. ISLAM AS AN IDENTIFIER

One of the readily identifiable features of a given ethnicity, aside from physical appearance, is its religion. Religion has always been an issue of importance to the Russian Empire. Well before the nineteenth century, Russian leaders were concerned with religion primarily as an aspect of security. There was fear that the Islamic empires to the south would undermine Russian expansion into the Caucasus through the basis of a common religion.<sup>117</sup>

The process of utilizing religion as a means to categorize imperial subjects predates the implementation of population politics. Through the fourteenth century, concurrent with the Russian expansion into Kazan, religion was used as a distinguishing characteristic of imperial subjects. During the subsequent centuries, the Russians undertook an intermittent program of forced conversions to Orthodoxy. It was believed

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<sup>114</sup> Peter Holquist, “To Count, To Extract, and to Exterminate,” 128

<sup>115</sup> Peter Holquist, “To Count, To Extract, and to Exterminate,” 128

<sup>116</sup> Peter Holquist, “To Count, To Extract, and to Exterminate,” 130. In the wake of the Domodedovo Airport bombing Russian president Dmitri Medvedev labeled those responsible, a nest of bandits. This is particularly interesting as early suspicion rested upon Chechen fighters led by Doku Umarov. The phrase “nest of bandits” was likely not a casual reference but one that links modern combatants to those fought by General Yermolov.

<sup>117</sup> Michael Khordarkovsky, “Ignoble Savages and Unfaithful Subjects: Constructing Non-Christian Identities in Early Modern Russia,” in Daniel R. Bower and Edward J. Lazzerini, eds. *Russia’s Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700–1917* (Bloomington, In: Indiana University Press, 1997), 19.



that conversion was the only means of ensuring loyalty to the tsar.<sup>118</sup> By the eighteenth century the practice of distinguishing subjects by religion was well in place.<sup>119</sup>

As the eighteenth century ended, religion was not only a means by which external powers grouped North Caucasian tribes but increasingly a way for Caucasians to identify themselves. As mentioned earlier, the process of assimilating Islam into the Caucasian tribal structure was slow. Slow progress had been made from the sixth century Arab incursions, but by the end of the eighteenth century Islam had become an important social identifier. However, Islam's penetration was still far from complete and uniform. Two main forms of Sufi Islam were present in the region, Naqshbandi and Qadiri. Even this is misleading, as the practice of each form varied from valley to valley and village to village.<sup>120</sup>

A network of religious schools preaching the Naqshbandi version of Sufi Islam expanded out of Dagestan.<sup>121</sup> Naqshbandi tended towards a more aggressive and fundamental interpretation of Islam, this tended to appeal to the martial character of the Chechens.<sup>122</sup> As this form merged with the more fundamental aspects of the Chechen character, it was easier to spread, thereby providing a basis for a common identity. In addition to providing the Chechens with a concept of a community beyond the tribe, Naqshbandi called its followers to resist outside influences that were attempting to corrupt Islam. Followers could be called upon to support a holy war, jihad, or, gazavat, as it was called in the Caucasus.<sup>123</sup> It was this call to arms that first unified the tribes under a common identity not just a common purpose. As Muslims, the tribes were taught to set aside inter-tribe conflict to resist the invaders. Ironically, it was through this unified resistance that the perception of a criminal Chechen identity expanded. The efforts of Chechen resistance figures such as Sheik Mansur and Imam Shamil connected

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<sup>118</sup> Michael Khordarkovsky, "Ignoble Savages and Unfaithful Subjects," 17–19.

<sup>119</sup> Michael Khordarkovsky, "Ignoble Savages and Unfaithful Subjects," 21.

<sup>120</sup> Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom*, 65.

<sup>121</sup> Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom*, 66.

<sup>122</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 37.

<sup>123</sup> Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom*, 66.

Islam and Chechens with criminality in the minds of the Russians. These same figures glorified martial skills and resistance in the minds of the Chechens. While the connection in the minds of the Chechens may not have had a criminal overtone, it did result in a belief that the Chechens were outside of Russian society.<sup>124</sup>

#### **D. SHAMIL'S RESISTANCE**

Another event critical in the shaping of the perception of Chechen criminality was the war waged by Imam Shamil. Shamil's resistance effort would influence Chechens and Russians alike well after the fall of the Soviet Union. This perception of criminality was aided in part by the tsarist implementation of population politics with its attempts to extract bandit elements from the Caucasus. Russian policy in the Caucasus to isolate criminal elements was also aided by an empire-wide emphasis upon the criminality of banditry. In the early 1820s the tsarist government implemented stricter legal regulations upon the nomadic peoples of the steppe and Siberia, with a focus on robbery and plunder.<sup>125</sup> Despite differences in the application of imperial rule, it is logical that a similar legal definition would apply to the Chechen tribes who were also engaging in raiding and threatening Russian supply lines. Not only were Shamil's forces posing a viable military threat, they tended to undertake raids in order to sustain warriors and communities living in the remote mountain valleys.

Russian military leaders operating in the Caucasus were at a loss when presented with the difficulty of defeating Shamil's fighters. With the successes of the Russian military during the early decades of the nineteenth century, Russian leaders were consistently striving for a decisive military victory over the Chechens.<sup>126</sup> However, the mountains did not lend themselves to a massed infantry battle to be culminated with a cavalry charge. Mountain fighting tended to favor the light infantry employed in ambush or skirmishers, a lesson that took loss of several regiments before the Russians were to

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<sup>124</sup> Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom*, 66–67.

<sup>125</sup> Virginia Martin, "Barimta: Nomadic Custom, Imperial Crime" in Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzerini eds. *Russia's Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700–1917* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 250.

<sup>126</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 44.

learn. The fact that Chechens did not fight like a civilized combatant reinforced the perception that they, like many other of the empire's people were little more than savages.<sup>127</sup>

Chechen criminality was further reinforced in the eyes of the Russian by their seemingly primitive social structure, alien cultural practices and emphasis on martial skill. Academics, drawing largely upon Russian military statistics and foreign observers describe the Chechen political structure as largely anarchic, being based on nothing larger than an extended family unit.<sup>128</sup> Individuals who had reported to meet Chechens often noted their strange practices such as those to recompense for violations of the social code. Buchan notes the Chechens possess.

...on the one hand reckless courage, extreme generosity, hospitality, loyalty, respect of the aged and love of animals: on the other hand, a sensibility to offense and a childish vindictiveness which was expressed in perpetual and blood-thirsty vendettas, extreme personal vanity, a disinclination to submit to discipline, or to undertake regular work, cruelty, callousness and violence<sup>129</sup>

If resistance to Russian authority was at the core of banditry, then Shamil was the quintessential Chechen bandit. From an early age he began developing the skills he would use to resist the Russian, particularly the “mountain virtues of skill with gun, *kindjal* (knife), and *shashka* (sword).<sup>130</sup> With these skills Shamil combined a reputation as a religious figure to create and lead a 30-year resistance. In doing so he deepened the myth surrounding him and the fierceness of Chechen fighters.

Shamil's resistance managed to merge traditional Chechen characteristics with an Islamic social structure. While this placed him and his followers outside of the norms of

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<sup>127</sup> Michael Khodarkovsky, “Ignoble Savages and Unfaithful Subjects: Constructing Non-Christian Identities in Early Modern Russia” in Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzerini eds. *Russia's Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700–1917* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 9–26. Michael Khodarkovsky describes in detail the reason for Russian perception of savagery among its periphery in his work

<sup>128</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict*, 28–29.

<sup>129</sup> John Buchan, *The Baltic and Caucasian States* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1923), 179. Quoted in Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict: 1800–2000: A Deadly Embrace* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), 29.

<sup>130</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict*, 41.

Russian society, it was the way in which he conducted the resistance the cemented the identity of bandit. During his resistance, the Chechens avoided any attempt by Russian forces to engage in a pitched battle. Like Robin Hood, Shamil and his troops stayed hidden in the forests and mountains and engaged the Russians only when they could ensure a Chechen victory. In order to augment the meager provisions of the Chechen tribes, Shamil's troops engaged in a liberal raiding campaign. In addition to captured goods, the Chechens undertook an extensive hostage for ransom enterprise.<sup>131</sup> All of these actions firmly reinforced the notion of Chechen banditry.<sup>132</sup>

He also reinforced the label of Chechen bandit, in both Hobsbawm's definition and that of the Russian and Soviet leaders. Shamil forged the tribes together, through the combination of Islamic beliefs, personal charisma and force. The fierce resistance Shamil and his fighters displayed reinforced a perception of the Chechens being incompatible with Russian society. From this resistance, Shamil and his followers exhibited elements of what Hobsbawm referred to as social banditry, engaging in criminal acts under the auspices of protecting the oppressed.<sup>133</sup> Shamil, or his myth, served as a rallying point and model for future Chechen resistance attempts. It was the success of Shamil's image as a resistance figure that produced a love-hate relationship throughout the final years of the empire and the Soviet period.<sup>134</sup>

Continued resistance to Russian conquest would be the hallmark of Russo-Chechen relations throughout the end of the empire. It was this perception of criminality that was transferred to their Soviet successors; although historic Chechen resistance was overlooked in favor of the defeat of a common enemy, it soon became an issue. As the Soviets broke one promise after another, the Chechen resistance was reborn. These new

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<sup>131</sup> Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom*, 53–63.

<sup>132</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800-2000*, 50–52

<sup>133</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 20.

<sup>134</sup> Bulent Gokay, "The Russian Debate over Shamil," 25–64. In his work, Bulent Gokay details the main points of the Russian and Soviet debate over Shamil. He was used as a image, either good or bad, by Moscow's leaders with the aim of influencing Chechen actions. His image was also utilized as a rallying point for Russians against the Chechens during their numerous rebellions.

efforts reached back to the exploits of Shamil for moral support.<sup>135</sup> Combined with the concept of “elements” and an expanded definition of banditry, the Soviets embarked upon a monumental application of population politics, culminating in the 1944 deportation and exile of the Chechens.

#### **E. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MYTHICAL CHECHEN**

Over the course of the past 200 years, the myth of Chechen criminality and savagery has been constructed and re-constructed through two lenses: the physical interaction of conquest and resistance as well as literature. Both of these lenses have often worked together in a mutually reinforcing manner, most effectively where the creators of the latter lens were participants in the former lens. Early examples of this phenomenon are most evident in the writings of nineteenth century Russian authors, particularly the efforts of Lermontov, Pushkin and Tolstoy.

Not only were all three authors significant literary figures they had personal experience in the Caucasus. In addition to the personal experience all three authors lend to their works, the fact that they were prominent literary figures of their day added to both the credibility and circulation of their works. The arrangement was not a supply driven situation, throughout the early to mid nineteenth century there was a growing demand for literature whose subject was the Asian regions of Russia. This demand grew out of the blooming romantic era of Russian literature, an era that saw a significant increase in works focused on the North Caucasus.<sup>136</sup> Popular literature was the nineteenth century equivalent of today’s mass media; it served to shape its reader’s understanding of their world. The audience of Lermontov, Pushkin and Tolstoy were not just the intellectuals of Russia, but of the western world. It was these intellectuals who influenced the course of events throughout the nineteenth century, and whose perceptions of the Caucasus were affected by a fictional and romanticized vision.

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<sup>135</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 75.

<sup>136</sup> Susan Layton, “Nineteenth-Century Russian Mythologies of Caucasian Savagery” *Russia’s Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700–1917* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), 80.

Aside from several academic expeditions dispatched to the Caucasus, Alexander Pushkin created one of the most influential works pertaining to the region.<sup>137</sup> His poem “Captive of the Caucasus” sets to verse the contradictions resident within in the Caucasian tribes: nobility and savagery, honor and banditry. In addition to portraying the duality of the Caucasian character he manages to contrast this nature against that of the Russian. In the poem, a civilized Russian is captured by a savage mountaineer, in this case a Circassian, and taken to a remote village. During his captivity, the Russian is attracted to the Circassian’s daughter, who eventually helps him to escape. When the Russian explains that he will not return her love, she kills herself.<sup>138</sup>

The poem appealed to a wide range of readers. Its romantic core drew in readers who may not have been particularly interested in a story of a Caucasian mountaineer, while its detail of terrain and culture appealed to those students of the Caucasus. The true impact revolved around the effort on Pushkin’s part to pass off his work as a “ground truth” vision of the Caucasus.<sup>139</sup> This was despite the fact that the poem was written after a two-month trip to the spa resort at Piatigorsk.<sup>140</sup> Pushkin’s limited experience and understanding of the region did not preclude his poem from becoming a source of study for those interested in the Caucasian region.<sup>141</sup> Later, Pushkin would refer to the poem as, “an unsuccessful experiment with character over which he and his friends had quite a few laughs.”<sup>142</sup> Despite Pushkin’s derision, many intellectuals of the nineteenth century conceptualized the Caucasus in terms Pushkin penned, specifically a mountain fortress manned by fierce mountaineers and beautiful women.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> During the reign of Catherine the Great, five expeditions were charted with the express purpose of categorizing those people who resided in the Caucasus. It was academics that undertook the methodical study of the geography and people, largely as part of the efforts of military geography to support the empire’s expansion. For additional information regarding this topic refer to Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom: A History of the Caucasus* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 100–108.

<sup>138</sup> King, *The Ghost of Freedom: A History of the Caucasus*, 110–111.

<sup>139</sup> King, *The Ghost of Freedom: A History of the Caucasus*, 110.

<sup>140</sup> King, *The Ghost of Freedom: A History of the Caucasus*, 111.

<sup>141</sup> Susan Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 16, 21–35.

<sup>142</sup> W. Bruce Lincoln, *Between Heaven and Hell*, 135.

<sup>143</sup> Susan Layton, “Nineteenth-Century Russian Mythologies of Caucasian Savagery,” 84.

While Pushkin created a vision of romance, adventure and most importantly freedom in the Caucasus, painting a picture of a noble bandit in every Caucasian, Mikhail Lermontov provided the more gritty reality unfolding in the Caucasus. Having been forced to serve twice in the Caucasus campaigns, Lermontov saw the horrors of combat first hand. His poetry spoke to the struggle between Russian expansion and the Caucasian, most likely Chechen, resistance.<sup>144</sup> It was a struggle where neither side was wholly good, but again where the Chechens were portrayed as a noble savage. The net effect was to solidify the motivations of freedom within the Chechens and the corresponding perception of their criminality among Russians. Many Caucasians would later cite Lermontov, extolling the poet had indeed captured the essence of the struggle for freedom, “It was not a general before whom the Caucasus bowed, but the poetry of a young lieutenant.”<sup>145</sup>

Leo Tolstoy furthered the works of Lermontov in as much as he continued to describe the savagery and ultimately the futility of the military campaign in the Caucasus. Like the preceding authors, Tolstoy focuses on martial skill, honor and the drive for freedom as defining the Caucasians.<sup>146</sup> In his work *Hadji Murat*, Tolstoy recounts a series of betrayals and redemptions surrounding one of Shamil’s lieutenants, which ultimately ended in the main character’s valiant death.<sup>147</sup> Tolstoy, at once praises Murat as a prime example of the noble savage while criminalizing Shamil for his cruel tactics. It was this drive for freedom that defined the Caucasian character along with willingness for violence and cruelty. In the later years, the Russian leadership would attempt to play both sides of this dichotomy for their advantage. For the remainder of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, Moscow would attempt to rally supporters around those aspects of the “good” mountaineer, while demonizing those “bad” aspects.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> King, *The Ghost of Freedom*, 113.

<sup>145</sup> Rasul Gamzatov, quoted in Bruce Grant, “Brides, Brigands and Fire-Bringers” in Bruce Grant and Lale Yalcin-Heckmann, eds, *Caucasus paradigms, Anthropologies, Histories and the Making of a World Area* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2008), 6, cited in Thomas De Waal, *The Caucasus: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 43.

<sup>146</sup> King, *The Ghost of Freedom*, 117–118.

<sup>147</sup> King, *The Ghost of Freedom*, 118.

<sup>148</sup> Susan Layton, “Nineteenth-Century Russian Mythologies of Caucasian Savagery,” 94.

This attempt at manipulating the perceptions of both the Russian population and the Chechens was continued under the Soviets. The most evident example relates to the changing portrayal of Shamil through the Soviet times. In an attempt to garner the support of those Caucasian elements opposed to the Russian Empire the Bolsheviks took to defining some of Shamil's undertaking, in the guise of national self determination, specifically stating that the Bolsheviks were not opposed to a *Shariat* state.<sup>149</sup> Soviet support of Shamil and his resistance was gradually reduced as the Chechens increasingly resisted Soviet consolidation and collectivization. This continued until the complete removal of Chechens and Chechnya from the Soviet official history after their 1944 deportation.<sup>150</sup> The Soviet efforts to criminalize, and then remove, the single most important figure in Chechen history was a significant step towards the criminalization of the entire identity.

The myth of Chechen criminality did not stop with their removal from Soviet texts, it continued in the writings of new authors and among the Soviet social circles. After their release from exile in 1956, many Chechens migrated back to the Caucasus only to be confronted with new instances of anti-Chechen pogroms. Chechens were persecuted for a number of charges, ranging from economic sabotage to terrorism.<sup>151</sup> Russian attempts at criminalization were likely manifestations of a systematic fear of the Chechens. As a whole, the Chechens were generally considered a group that could not be cowed or controlled by Soviet officials, specifically because the Chechens did not fear the Soviet government.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn points to this fact in his work *Gulag Archipelago*, recounting the defiance Chechens exhibited towards prison officials.<sup>152</sup> This resistance to authority was the natural extension of two defining moments in the Chechen history: Shamil's resistance and the deportation. Chechen resistance and its subsequent

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<sup>149</sup> Bulent Gokay, "The Russian Debate over Shamil," 31.

<sup>150</sup> Bulent Gokay, "The Russian Debate over Shamil," 40–43.

<sup>151</sup> Bulent Gokay, "The Russian Debate over Shamil," 44.

<sup>152</sup> Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918–1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation, Vol III*, trans. Harry Willetts (New York: Perennial Library, 1977), 193, 320, 401.



criminalization would not end with their release from exile. Chechen criminality would be perpetuated in the modern media and through official channels.

Soviet law enforcement would play a significant role in the development and spread of the mythical Chechen criminal. Law enforcement accomplished the spread of Chechen criminality in two ways: first, it continued a form of quasi-exile for Chechens throughout its territory by imposing a system of unequal laws, and second it propagated spurious reports of Chechen criminality to the media and foreign law enforcement agencies. Unequal treatment of ethnic minorities by the Soviet law enforcement agencies is not unique to the Chechens at one time or another most minorities within the Soviet Union experienced some degree of disproportionate attention. Anna Politkovskaya describes one such case in her work *A Dirty War*, where a Chechen, in complying with a city requirement to re-register was detained and then falsely accused, all stemming from his ethnicity.<sup>153</sup> Chechens and the other North Caucasians served as a convenient internal enemy, one who was different and combative and evoked historic animosities. Soviet officials could play upon this public animosity and attribute criminal offenses to the Chechens. This animosity would then be reinforced through the release of police reports indicting the Chechens to Soviet media sources. Russian and international reporters, in search of a story that captures the attention of its readers would grasp onto these police reports and spread them as fact.<sup>154</sup> Chechens as the villain and source of the ongoing economic and social woes experienced by Soviet and Russian society was likely an oddly reassuring concept and fit with an existing preconceived notion. Demonizing the Chechens was not limited to the police and reporters, in a recreation of the works of Pushkin and Tolstoy; Chechens have reappeared in Russian cinema.

Most of the Russian perceptions of Chechen criminality would be rooted directly or indirectly in two critical events in Chechen history. These events galvanized the notion of what it means to be Chechen in the minds of both Russians and Chechens alike. Shamil's resistance linked the Chechen identity to the act of resisting Moscow's rule, at

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<sup>153</sup> Anna Politkovskaya, "A Tale of Love and Fascism," in *A Dirty War* (London: The Harvill Press, 2001), 52–58.

<sup>154</sup> Joseph D. Serio, *Investigating the Russian Mafia* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2008), 57.

once creating a rebel hero and a criminal in a single person. The deportation served to unite all Chechens through a shared suffering; it further placed the Chechens on the outside of Soviet then Russian law and in effect criminalized the entire ethnicity.

## **F. THE DEPORTATION OF 1944**

February 23, 1944, was not the first time Chechens had been subjected to forced relocation, but it was the most significant. Almost since the beginning of the Russo-Chechen relationship there has existed a policy on the part of Moscow to deport segments of the population that were perceived to be a threat. Because of their continued violent resistance to central authority, the Chechens in varying numbers have been exiled. Interestingly, previous efforts at exile and savagery were centered on St. Petersburg's concept of citizenship and a belief that the Chechens were incapable of conforming to this ideal.<sup>155</sup>

While the motives behind the early relocations were likely, at least partially, influenced by the nineteenth century concepts of harmful societal "elements," they may have also been influenced by the geopolitical situation of the era. Russian desire to establish a buffer between the two neighboring Islamic empires and its own Muslim population, likely fueled the relocations. Many of the relocations were undertaken during the middle of the century, in the midst of the attempt to secure the Caucasus interior. Leading thinkers of the time saw relocation, either forced or voluntary as the most permanent solution to the Chechen problem, as it placed a population of loyal citizens between the two Muslim populations.<sup>156</sup> It turned out that this was a valid concern because tensions between the Ottoman Empire and Russia escalated culminating in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877. Ironically, in the preceding decade the Turkish government offered to resettle several thousand Chechen and Dagestani tribes, who would later play a role in the subsequent war.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Austin Lee Jersild, "From Savagery to Citizenship: Caucasian Mountaineers and Muslims in the Russian Empire" in Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. Lazzerini eds. *Russia's Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700–1917* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 102.

<sup>156</sup> Austin Lee Jersild, "From Savagery to Citizenship," 103–104.

<sup>157</sup> Austin Lee Jersild, "From Savagery to Citizenship," 104.

Deportation and exile continued to be practices employed by the powers in Moscow after the establishment of the Soviet Union. Lenin and his followers supported the growth of titular nationalities during the initial push to consolidate their power. However, when nationalism began to threaten Soviet control, support was quickly withdrawn and replaced by mass criminalization. Inclusive to the process was the mass criminalization of entire sections of the society, specifically those identified as *kulaks*.

Through the 1920s, the Soviet economy went through a series of wild gyrations. As a result of the chaotic civil war and an overestimation of centralized economic control, there was a growing conflict between rural and urban populations. In 1923, early efforts at the expansion of manufacturing produced an overabundance of manufactured goods and a lack of agriculture products, encouraging the peasants to keep their goods. In the following year, the process was reversed with a surplus of agriculture products and a dearth of manufactured goods. The cycle began to stabilize during the final years of the decade until a new crisis erupted. Agricultural production had fallen to the point where rural communities had to import grain for subsistence.<sup>158</sup>

During the final years of the New Economic Program, the Soviet regime initiated criminal codes aimed at persecuting economic exploitation. In 1927, article 107 unleashed the secret police against the new entrepreneur class, *nepmany*. This process would be repeated in the rural regions against the *nepmany's* cousin, the *kulak*. As early as the Party Congress of 1927, the idea of implementing a mass industrialization of agriculture had entered the political discussions. Concurrent with this discussion was the demonization of rural entrepreneurs. The *kulak* was painted as the cause of grain shortages in the cities, because he desired more profit.<sup>159</sup>

Collectivization progressed with significant resistance throughout the rural Soviet Union. Resistance and hardship increased with the artificially generated famines of the early 1930s. Soviet military forces were dispatched throughout the land to quell peasant uprisings and forcibly relocate peasants to the collective farms. This process was

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<sup>158</sup> Martin Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy: A History of Socialism in Russia, 1917–1991* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 149–150.

<sup>159</sup> Chris Ward, *Stalin's Russia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 39–44.

replicated in the North Caucasus, where “four infantry divisions, one rifle division, three artillery divisions and two regiments of mountain infantry were brought in to quell uprisings.”<sup>160</sup>

In 1930, Chechen guerrillas engaged in a violent rebellion, waged mostly from the mountains and forests of Chechnya. Heavy fighting continued for nearly a year until the Soviets offer of accommodation. The accommodation turned out to be a deception, and 35,000 Chechen fighters were arrested and subjected to punishments ranging from exile to death. Chechen resistance to collectivization continued throughout the remainder of the decade. By 1938, 490 collective farms had been established in Chechnya but all suffered from low productivity rates. Soviet authorities continued to blame the lack of success in Chechnya, on the presence of “hostile class elements.”<sup>161</sup> These hostile elements would continue to shape Soviet perceptions of the Chechens, and would lead to the criminalization of the entire Chechen population and their exile.

As was pointed out previously, ideas and personnel central to the Soviet nationalities efforts were inherited from the tsarist state. These individuals possessed not only grounding in the conduct of population politics, but an understanding of the event of the past hundred years in the Caucasus. It was the combination of this understanding of recent history, the belief in the process of population politics and a concern of external forces that shaped the decision to conduct the 1944 deportation. However, there were several significant differences between the 1944 deportation and the ones of the previous century. Purpose and severity were the main differences of the two sets of deportations. In the previous occurrences, the deportations were undertaken as a preventative measure to improve the border security. Even the deportations undertaken in response to collectivization were done for security reasons. This was not the case in 1944 as the deportations were conducted after the threat, the German army, had departed. In this case it appeared the deportations were undertaken for punitive reasons.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 78.

<sup>161</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 79.

<sup>162</sup> William Flemming, “The Deportations of 1944,” in *Russia and Chechnia: The Permanent Crisis*, ed Ben Fowkes, (New York: St. Martin Press, 1998), 66.

In terms of severity, the deportations of 1944 were incomparable to previous iterations. As the German military was withdrawing back west, Stalin acting through his representative Lavrentii Beria, issued orders for the removal of several suspect North Caucasus nationalities. Planning for the operation began in late 1943 and was finalized in December, despite the legislative basis for the operation not being proposed until late January 1944.<sup>163</sup> The title of the decree published by the State Committee for Defense “On the Liquidation of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR and the Resettlement of the Chechens and Ingush in the Kazakh and Kirghiz SSRs” was both clinical and chilling. Like many of the official action undertaken by Stalin, the majority of the planning and execution was accomplished in secret. It was not until April 1944; well after the deportation had occurred that the operation was brought to the attention of the Supreme Soviet during a closed session.<sup>164</sup>

As with the planning and approval, the movement of the NKVD force into the Chechen-Ingush ASSR was accomplished under a blanket of secrecy and deception. The NKVD force assigned to conduct the operation arrived in late January dressed in Red Army uniforms under the pretense of a military training exercise. In a stroke of evil genius, the force was billeted with Chechen and Ingush families instead of in field quarters. This allowed the NKVD forces to familiarize themselves with the region as well as the people.<sup>165</sup> It appears that the subterfuge was intended to preclude a general flight to the Chechen’s traditional mountain redoubts. Soviet leaders surely did not want to repeat the battles of the 1850s or 1920s, whether or not they were facing a withdrawing Nazi army. In any case, the operation was reportedly conducted with remarkable success.

Beginning on 23 February, the NKVD force under the direction of Beria, began loading Chechen and Ingush families onto trucks for transport to designated railheads for further movement. The following figures provide a reference to the swiftness and scale of the operation. There were nearly 120,000 NKVD, NKGB, and Army personnel

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<sup>163</sup> William Flemming, “The Deportations of 1944,” 70.

<sup>164</sup> William Flemming, “The Deportations of 1944,” 70.

<sup>165</sup> William Flemming, “The Deportations of 1944,” 70.

involved in the operation.<sup>166</sup> By the morning of 24 February, these forces had relocated 333,379 Chechens and Ingush to “special collection points” and 176,950 of these had already been loaded on trains.<sup>167</sup> By 1 March, the operation was nearly complete; the final figures would put the number deported at nearly 500,000.<sup>168</sup>

It is hard to imagine a situation where the Chechens, who had to this point been a recalcitrant population, easy to anger and tied to both their freedom and the mountains, would meekly be loaded onto trains to be swept away to parts unknown. One rational for the reportedly lack of violent opposition could be traced to the demographics of the area at the time of the deportation. Most of the able-bodied men of fighting age were either conscripted into the Red Army or were fighting in anti-communist bands, in either case they were away from their homeland.<sup>169</sup> This lack of men may be part of the reason for the decidedly low accounts of resistance. Secondly, the manner in which the operation was carried out likely affected the level of violence. By billeting a large number of soldiers throughout the region the Soviets were able to achieve operational and tactical surprise on the civilian population. This surprise would have effectively eliminated any form of coordinated collective resistance by the population. Thirdly, the NKVD reinforced the element of surprise with incidents of extreme violence, specifically regarding the portion of the population that fell into the “un-transportable” category. According to accounts, these individuals were routinely executed on the spot, as was the case of Khaibach on 27 February 1944.<sup>170</sup> Official reports suggest that the consideration of prime importance was efficiency. Beria, in his letters to Stalin, repeatedly cites numbers of deportees in relation to time frame.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> William Flemming, “The Deportations of 1944,” 70.

<sup>167</sup> William Flemming, “The Deportations of 1944,” 70.

<sup>168</sup> William Flemming, “The Deportations of 1944,” 65.

<sup>169</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 83.

<sup>170</sup> William Flemming, “The Deportations of 1944,” 74. On 27 Feb, 1944 in the village of Khaibach, between 650 and 700 individuals who were unable or unwilling to walk to the trucks were herded into a communal barn and locked in, after which the barn was set on fire and all inside were killed.

<sup>171</sup> William Flemming, “The Deportations of 1944,” 70-75.

Khaibach is not the only place where eyewitness accounts diverged from the clinical official reports. Elsewhere there remains a discrepancy between official accounts and the surviving eyewitness reports that underscores the brutality of the deportation. There appears to be little concern for anything outside of maintaining the schedule. Collection operations were done with an emphasis on speed, resulting in the Chechens departing with only the close on their backs and possibly a handful of portable possession. In many cases, the emphasis on efficiency resulted in families being separated at the point of collection never to be reunited.<sup>172</sup>

It was not only at the point of collection that official accounts differed regarding the treatment of the “special settlers,” accounts of the transportation and the settlement conditions diverged. Official instructions regarding the requirements of the rail cars provide one such example. Beria had issued instructions that:

2.c.) Each wagon must be equipped for human transportation, it must have bunk beds, a stove, and other necessary objects.

3) Food for deportees is to be provided by the commandant of the train at specially allotted points along the line of march. A doctor and two nurses are to be assigned to each train with the necessary medicaments and instruments.<sup>173</sup>

Logistical preparations were based upon population estimates, from these it was calculated that each train would be required to transport an average of 2740 people.<sup>174</sup> It seems unlikely that during the war there would be sufficient medical personnel or equipment diverted from the military and applied to a rebellious population. Additionally, it is unlikely that in a time where food was a premium it would be diverted in sufficient quantities to support the relocation effort. The official policy was modified during the execution of the deportation; NKVD officials did away with baggage cars, owing to the fact that the Chechens were not allowed to depart with any substantial amount of baggage. Concurrent with re-missioning the train carriages, additional people

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<sup>172</sup> William Flemming, “The Deportations of 1944,” 74.

<sup>173</sup> GARF, f.9479c, op.1c, d.182, 302, quoted in William Flemming, “The Deportations of 1944,” 74.

<sup>174</sup> William Flemming, “The Deportations of 1944,” 73.

were loaded onto each car, since “To increase the shipment of the special contingent from 40 to 45 by packing more into the wagon is entirely appropriate given the presence of a proportion of 40 to 50 per cent of children in the special contingent.”<sup>175</sup>

Hardship, humiliation, and violence continued during the transportation. Little was officially reported regarding the food or heating in the trains during the shipment, but it is generally accepted that both were in short supply. The facilities described in Beria’s instruction were generally absent, men women and children huddled together for warmth during the nearly month long trip. Owing to a lack of latrines they were forced to carve holes in the floors of the train and share its use, an enormously embarrassing act in Chechen culture.<sup>176</sup> Disease was common among the trains and caused the deaths of an unknown percentage of the deportees. The deportees buried the dead alongside the rail line; these impromptu graveyards were within a stone’s throw of the train because anyone venturing more than five meters from the train was shot for fear of escaping.<sup>177</sup>

Conditions failed to improve upon arrival to the “special settlements” this is not surprising as these camps were administered by the GULAG until 1944.<sup>178</sup> Special settlements were not unique to the ethnic deportations of 1943 and 1944, they had been in existence since at least 1929 and used in conjunction with the Soviet de-Kulakization. The camps were not necessarily the same as those in Kolyma and Magadan, often the special settlers worked alongside locals; it was only in terms of their rights significant variations were noted.<sup>179</sup> Hussein, the central figure in Thomas Goltz’s book “*Chechen*

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<sup>175</sup> Bugai, “Posledstviia deportatsii narodov,” “Report on the provision of special transportation in connection with the deportation of the Chechens, the Ingush and the Balkars,” 150, cited in William Flemming, “The Deportations of 1944,” 75.

<sup>176</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000: A Deadly Embrace*, 83–84.

<sup>177</sup> Bugai, *I. Stalin-L. Berii*, p 107, cited in William Flemming, “The Deportations of 1944,” 74.

<sup>178</sup> William Flemming, “The Deportations of 1944,” 76. GULAG refers to the Main Administration of Corrective Labor Camps and is synonymous with the Soviet penal system.

<sup>179</sup> William Flemming, “The Deportations of 1944,” 77.



*Diary*” illustrates this point, born in Kazakhstan, he and his fellow Chechens managed to carve out a successful niche in the community but only after their 1956 rehabilitation.<sup>180</sup>

Aside from the relative proximity to the local population, Chechens might as well have been on another world. Significant restrictions were imposed upon them; they were subjected to additional monitoring or “special accounting” meaning the requirement to register with the local NKVD/MVD office. Their movements were restricted to within three kilometers of their residence. A continual lack of food and medicine contributed to a soaring mortality rate. Famine was frequently a problem for the Chechens; the meager food shipments arranged by the Soviets were often siphoned off by locals and administrators. The lack of proper clothing aided to the overall miserable condition, to such a point that the head of the Department of Special Settlements, M.V. Kuznetsov remarked on the effect on North Caucasian ability to be used as part of the labor force.<sup>181</sup>

The material conditions of the Chechens in exile led to an overall decrease in the total population. The material conditions were further exacerbated by the 1948 Presidium of the Supreme Soviet decree, which officially criminalized the Chechens and other deportees of the “Great Patriotic War.” The decree clarified the duration of the exile and its consequences, the duration was for life, and the consequences were 20 years in the GULAG for any attempted escape.<sup>182</sup> If there had been any doubt about the criminality of the Chechens this decree put that doubt to rest.

February 23, 1944, would forever be a defining moment in the lives of the Chechens. Its memory was passed down from generation to generation, so that even the youngest Chechen is cognizant of the experience. The experience of the deportation produced two effects relative to the criminalization of the Chechens; it untied the population and officially criminalized it. Events with the level of brutality and violence,

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<sup>180</sup> Thomas Goltz, *Chechen Diary: A War Correspondent's Story of Surviving the War in Chechnya* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2003), 8. References to Hussein and his story are interspersed throughout the book. In total, the book provides a unique insight into the motivations of one of the tactical leaders of the first Russo-Chechen War anyone interested in this subject should include *Chechen Diary* in their reading list.

<sup>181</sup> William Flemming, “The Deportations of 1944,” 79.

<sup>182</sup> William Flemming, “The Deportations of 1944,” 81–82.

such as the 1944 deportation and the subsequent exile, leave a lasting impression; one only has to look south at the Armenian-Turkish relationship to see a similar regional experience. For the Chechens, the deportations would solidify their concept of self, as one apart from their Russian countrymen and one that was decidedly criminal.

## **G. CONCLUSION**

The concept of Chechen criminality is not the product of one era or another. The notion has grown throughout the entire course of interaction between the Russians and the Chechens. It is a combination of action and reaction on the part of both Russians and Chechens. It has been crystallized through two significant events, Shamil's resistance and the deportation. Running through the entire history has been the growth of a Chechen mythology, focusing on resistance to authority, and participation in criminal or perceived criminal acts. In the end the myth produced a belief inside Russia and outside of the existence of a violent and expansive ethnic organized crime group. While there are elements of truth to the notion of Chechen criminality, its pervasiveness was uniformly exaggerated. Not all Chechens were criminals in the strictest sense, although it would be false to say that there was not an influential criminal element within the Chechen community and that this element provided significant support in the formation of a Chechen government.

#### IV. CHECHEN MAFIA: THE GENESIS

They had a strong clan system, based on family ties...Every Chechen youth was taught to obey and respect his elders and distrust outsiders. They were also addicted to firearms as a way of settling disputes or merely demonstrating prowess...They seemed to me very similar to the Sicilian mafia...When the Chechens were finally permitted to return after the war, they discovered that their best land had been occupied by strangers. What else could many of them do but turn to crime? It was a logical step to turn their clans into criminal groups. —Capt Yuri Nikishin, Moscow Police Organized Crime Squad<sup>183</sup>

Chechen involvement in organized crime has been at once, a central aspect of their culture and a product of evolutionary interaction with Russian and Soviet forces. In previous sections, we have explored the process of both forming a Chechen proto-state and the “criminalization” of the Chechen identity. Integral to each process was the interplay between the expanding power of Moscow and the resilience of local Chechen practices. When the two came into contact, a process of control and resistance was initiated. It was through this struggle, that the foundation was laid for the later development of a uniquely Chechen criminal “underworld.” At first, the criminal activities of the Chechens were limited to the immediate surroundings of their tribal lands. However, this changed significantly during the Soviet era with the expansion of the Soviet prison system and the 1944 deportation. These two instances combined with the unique economic situation in the Soviet Union ultimately facilitated the establishment of a robust network of Chechen criminal organizations.

This section will discuss the genesis of a unique ethnically based organized crime group comprised of individuals from Chechnya. Through out the long interaction between Chechens and Russians, the phenomenon of organized criminality has been saddled with a series of labels ranging from bandits to terrorists. Aside from the persistent label of bandits, the most persistent moniker of recent years has been “mafia.” There have been attempts in law enforcement and media circles to categorize the criminal

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<sup>183</sup> Stephen Handelman, *Comrade Criminal: Russia's New Mafiya* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 50.

groups in Russia's 1990s as mafias or a mafia. It is therefore necessary to discuss briefly the history of crime in Russia and the Soviet Union then address the concept of a Russian mafia before focusing on the Chechen variety.

## **A. ROOTS OF THE RUSSIAN RURAL CRIME**

Russian social and political workings have always been an area of confusion for outside observers. This has been the case from the beginning of Muscovite interactions with Western and continues to be true today. Edward Keenan attributes the lack of clarity to a mixture of cultural and environmental factors, the sum of which leads Russians to deliberately obscure the workings of their society.<sup>184</sup> Avoiding the debate of the actual role of cultural and environmental factors, it is reasonable to view Russian societal forces as strange and largely incomprehensible to foreign observers. For most western observers the strangeness of Russian traditions and political structure likely affected their ability to fully conceptualize the overt workings of the society. In his work, Marquis de Custine identifies and attempts to describe the inner workings of Russian society expounding upon the foundation laid by earlier travelers.<sup>185</sup> In doing so, he incorporates and perpetuates observations of previous travelers regarding the convoluted nature of Russian politics.<sup>186</sup> If confusion exists regarding the government, a largely overt structure, then little can be expected for a definitive analysis of the early criminal working in Russia.

Joseph Serio has undertaken an effort to shed some light on the early Russian criminal situation. Approaching the task from an oblique angle, Serio analyzes the experiences of early businessmen in Russia. Beginning with the interaction between Tsar Ivan IV and an English trader Richard Chancellor, Serio draws a sketch of a string of

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<sup>184</sup> Edward L. Keenan, "Muscovite Political Folkways" *The Russian Review* 45 (1986), 115–181.

<sup>185</sup> Irena G. Gross, "The Tangled Tradition: Custine, Herberstein, Karamzin, and the Critique of Russia" *Slavic Review* 50 (1991), 991. Gross notes de Custine likely did not read the works of all previous writers as some had yet to be translated into French, however he draw upon their concepts of Russian social structure.

<sup>186</sup> Irena G. Gross, "The Tangled Tradition: Custine, Herbertstein, Karamzin, and the Critique of Russia, 992. Two prominent authors of early Muscovite society Siegmund von Herberstein and Giles Fletcher noted the criminality of Muscovite society.

repressive tsars, corrupt bureaucrats and extensive smuggling which in the end stymied foreign business efforts. Despite his bleak portrayal of early business effort, little is discussed concerning sixteenth and seventeenth century crime. The only source is a MVD document citing “villages of bandits” who acting in accordance with Hobsbawm’s social bandit, fought and robbed for the freedom the seventeenth peasantry.<sup>187</sup>

Outside understanding of criminality from the eighteenth and nineteenth century is better than that of the preceding era. This increase in understanding is likely due to the attempts by Peter the Great, and the subsequent tsars and tsarinas, to open Russia to the West. It was during this time that travelers, such as de Custine, make their journeys and from their accounts; we are able to piece together an idea of the criminal world in Russia. Travelers commented on the pervasive criminality of Moscow in the eighteenth century, noting the prevalence of Russian thugs, armed beggars, and thieves.<sup>188</sup> Some of these criminals were even reported to have developed an organizational structure, including initiation rites and a criminal jargon, that some point to as an early form of organized crime.<sup>189</sup>

Groups of criminal were not only present in the urban areas but also throughout the remainder of the growing empire. Engaging in theft and extortion of travelers and peasants alike Russian rural criminals fit neatly into the broad framework of bandits espoused by Eric Hobsbawm.<sup>190</sup> Banditry in rural Russia was for the most part a local and personal activity; the bandits did not normally travel searching out victims instead opting to exploit those closest to them. However, there was an evolutionary process to the phenomena, whereby more wealthy peasants began to hire certain bandit elements for protection. Those groups who were more organized and powerful were naturally more successful<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Joseph D. Serio, *Investigating the Russian Mafia*, 97–104.

<sup>188</sup> Joseph Serio, *Investigating the Russian Mafia*, 104.

<sup>189</sup> Joseph Serio, *Investigating the Russian Mafia*, 104–105. Serio points to the example of “The Tale of Vanka Kain” as indicative of a developing organization within at least one aspect of the Russian criminal world.

<sup>190</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 9–18.

<sup>191</sup> Joseph Serio, *Investigating the Russian Mafia*, 106.

Concurrent with the process of exploitation and protection by groups of bandits was the contest over political control of the countryside. As Moscow expanded outward, its expeditionary elements, both administrative and military, were brought into contact and conflict with the existing bandit groups. This initial contact started a contest of control over who possessed the legitimate right to extract resources from the population. Rural administrators, like their bandit counterparts, demanded subsistence from the peasants, in the form of material and labor. These resources were often taken by means of coercion and from the perspective of the peasant, it was hard to discriminate between the two groups.<sup>192</sup>

Gradually through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Russian government grew in capability. It was more able to monopolize the use of force through a larger military. Its administrative structures were developed into a complex and if not perfect then a functioning bureaucracy. Through the process of cooption, inclusion and combat it was able to push the frontiers farther out. Despite the success in pushing the frontiers farther away from the core, there were still ample areas where rural crime continued, owing to a lack of effective oversight on the bureaucracy. Through much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, wages among the administrators were low, and their ratio to the citizenry was also low. The two factors led to an almost habitual adoption of graft and corruption.<sup>193</sup>

It was in this environment that the Russians encountered the Chechen tribes. The Chechens were one of many frontier societies whose survival required an element of banditry, specifically raiding the more agrarian communities and military units located in the Caucasian foothills. Life on the frontier was a mix of cooperation and conflict. Both sides were forced to trade with each other for basic necessities. Some contend that the formation of the line of forts spurred contact between Imperial Russia and Caucasians.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Joseph Serio, *Investigating the Russian Mafia*, 108–109.

<sup>193</sup> Joseph Serio, *Investigating the Russian Mafia*, 108–112.

<sup>194</sup> Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom*, 41.

For the Chechens, who were among the last to resist Russian expansion, this provided a foundation of the dualism that would characterize their subsequent relationship with Russian society. Even in the bloody First Chechen War, there was evidence of trade between the Russian military and Chechen rebels; surprisingly the items traded were weapons and the currency was dollars.<sup>195</sup> Vicious raids punctuated the trade by both sides, for the purpose of acquiring some material possession or to meet out punishment. However, the raids did little to stifle interaction. Moritz Wagner noted in the 1840s, "It was often a normal state of affairs...daily interaction between men and women who, a few nights before or after, might have found themselves on opposite sides of a military clash."<sup>196</sup>

Chechen criminality throughout much of this period was linked to their resistance to the expansion of Russian power. Raiding was a means of not only survival but also resistance. Chechen have long been idealized as the personification of resistance to outside oppression. This perception has been attributed to both, the relative size of the Chechen population and their consistent vigorous resistance to Russian rule.<sup>197</sup> This distinction was earned before the first Russian soldier entered into Caucasus Mountains. Chechen reputation was built upon daring and skilled raids into Russian controlled territories capturing livestock, hostages and women for slaves.<sup>198</sup>

This does not automatically place the Chechens into Hobsbawm's category of social banditry. For one the Chechens are based on a tribal structure that raid as a means of substance, this arrangement is expressly excluded from Hobsbawm's argument.<sup>199</sup> Being an egalitarian structure the Chechens lack an internal hierarchy that places the bandit in the role of social hero. Even taken in a broader perspective, where Chechens and Russians were elements of a single community, actors such as Shamil exist outside of

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<sup>195</sup> James Rupert, "Russians Sell Arms to Foes in Chechnya; Goods Available for Dollars Only," *Washington Post*, February 18, 1995, A01.

<sup>196</sup> Charles King, *The Ghost of Freedom: A History of the Caucasus*, 41.

<sup>197</sup> John Russell, "Terrorists, Bandits, Spooks and Thieves: Russian Demonization of the Chechens Before and since 9/11" *Third World Quarterly* 26 (2005): 103

<sup>198</sup> John Russell, "Terrorists, Bandits, Spooks and Thieves," 102

<sup>199</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, 21.

the concept of a social bandit. Shamil raided the Russians but not as a means of social protest, his raids generally had a military purpose. They were aimed either at weakening a Russian military force or capturing needed supplies, not to redress the grievance of the Chechen tribesman.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the state of Russian crime can be broken into several generalized categories. Urban centers were experiencing relatively high rates of crime centered on armed assaults and petty crimes, despite fairly draconian governmental policies. In the rural areas, elements of organized banditry continued but this was increasingly suppressed through military means. In both urban and rural settings corruption and low pay thwarted the establishment of effective police organizations.<sup>200</sup> This lack of pervasive law enforcement forced rural inhabitants to police themselves.<sup>201</sup>

The events of the First World War and the following revolution had a dramatic affect upon Russian society. It increased the causes of criminality through a lack of resources and security. Because of the dislocation of a significant portion of the rural population, there was an increase in the surplus of willing criminals. In an effort to consolidate political control, the Bolsheviks expanded their internal police structures and the prison system.<sup>202</sup> The expansion of the policing and penal institutions was significant but so to was the change in the concept of criminality. In the tsarist era criminals were generally still members of society but operating outside of the bounds of the law. They possessed institutions that would serve as the basis for Soviet era organized crime. In the Soviet era these criminals were no longer simply operating outside of law they were effectively outside of society.<sup>203</sup> This shift in perspective was likely a byproduct of the Soviet extension of thinking that they could isolate, and then extract harmful elements of

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<sup>200</sup> Joseph Serio, *Investigating the Russian Mafia*, 110–111.

<sup>201</sup> Mark Galeotti, “Criminal Russia: the Traditions Behind the Headlines” in *Russian and Post-Soviet Organized Crime* ed. Mark Galeotti (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2002), 4.

<sup>202</sup> Mark Galeotti, “Criminal Russia: the Traditions Behind the Headlines,” 4–5.

<sup>203</sup> Mark Galeotti, “Criminal Russia: the Traditions Behind the Headlines,” 5.



society, to facilitate greater central control and an earthly utopia.<sup>204</sup> Tanya Frisby summarizes this situation most succinctly:

The traditional criminal fraternity in the Soviet Union dates its formation from the end of the Civil War, when poverty, hunger, destitution and homelessness, especially among children and young people, were overwhelming. Crime was the only way of survival for these people. The majority of them, despite the state's rehabilitation efforts, entered the criminal world as professional robbers and thieves by the time of NEP. The tightening of the political order in the late 1920s also brought waves of arrests of criminal gangs and their leaders. They often shared prison cells and camp barracks with the political prisoners whose numbers were growing even more rapidly.<sup>205</sup>

It was precisely this period of time, that that saw an increase in the number of Chechens in the Soviet penal system, as a mixture of political and criminal inmates. Owing to their staunch resistance to Soviet authority the Chechens would have naturally gravitated to the values espoused by the growing organized criminal world, or *thieves' world*. The early years of the Soviet regime were most significant for the formation of the *thieves world* and it was the structure of this "world" that provided form to subsequent organized crime in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia.

## **B. THE EVOLUTION OF THE THIEVES' WORLD**

Life in the Soviet Union was analogous to living in a police state. Despite its characterization as a totalitarian state, control within the Soviet Union was never total. Soviet leadership was still able to maintain a degree of civil control even without total control over the territory.<sup>206</sup> Control in the Soviet state was accomplished through the "massive and arbitrary use of terror an imprisonment."<sup>207</sup> It was through the efforts of

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<sup>204</sup> For additional discussion of the concept of extraction refer to Peter Holquist, "To Count, To Extract, and to Exterminate: Population Statistics and Population Politics in Late Imperial and Soviet Russia" in *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 111–135.

<sup>205</sup> Tanya Frisby, "The Rise of Organized Crime in Russia: Its Roots and Social Significance" *Europe-Asia Studies* 50 (1998): 32.

<sup>206</sup> Tanya Frisby, "The Rise of Organized Crime in Russia: Its Roots and Social Significance," 32.

<sup>207</sup> Mark Galeotti, "Criminal Russia: the Traditions Behind the Headlines," In *Russian and Post Soviet Organized Crime*, ed. Mark Galeotti (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2002), 5.

the various security services that such terror was enacted. The expansive network of informers served to expand the capability of the security services, while breaking down the interpersonal support networks, as it was possible for anyone to be an informer.<sup>208</sup>

In the interstitial spaces, elements of the grey and black economies began to grow. Harsh conditions faced by the most deprived elements of society pushed them towards criminality for survival. As a whole, the Russian population faced such conditions during and immediately after the Civil War, but for the Chechens these conditions continued until the present.<sup>209</sup> There were significant ramifications of life in such a country. State survival was often linked to the presence of real or manufactured enemies. Chechens with their continued resistance to Soviet powers served the role of state enemy quite well and as such often ended up in prison.

Harsh conditions and the manufacture of state threats were characteristics of the Soviet Union, as the state began to re-exert its control over the territory and suppress rival power centers, with the natural byproduct of an increased prison population.<sup>210</sup>

As mentioned above, toward the end of the tsarist era criminal society had begun to form its own societal structures. These social structures were both representative of the larger Russian society and uniquely different. Throughout the region, like in the law-abiding version, criminals had organized themselves into mutually supportive communities.<sup>211</sup> Each of the communities had developed groups that specialized in certain variations of crime, ranging from horse theft to burglary.<sup>212</sup> They developed a rudimentary hierarchy as well as a robust language and system of symbols, expressed through tattoos. Most if not all of these characteristics survived the revolution and were

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<sup>208</sup> Mikhail Tsypkin, "The Security Agencies in the Russian Federation" (paper presented at Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey California, January 17–21, 2011), 3.

<sup>209</sup> Tanya Frisby, "The Rise of Organized Crime in Russia: Its Roots and Social Significance," 32.

<sup>210</sup> Tanya Frisby, "The Rise of Organized Crime in Russia: Its Roots and Social Significance," 32.

<sup>211</sup> Mark Galeotti, "Criminal Russia: the Traditions Behind the Headlines," 5.

<sup>212</sup> Mark Galeotti, "Criminal Russia: the Traditions Behind the Headlines," 5.

expanded upon in the Soviet prison system.<sup>213</sup> It was through the *thieves' world* and the *thief-in-law* that the traditions were passed along through generations of Soviet prisoners.<sup>214</sup>

Between the 1920s and 1950s, the *thieves' world* developed a strict code of conduct for its members. This code regulated the actions of its members as well as proscribing acceptable interaction with members outside of the *thieves' world*. Members spoke in a complex language, comprised of an amalgamation of Romany, Yiddish and other slang. They sported a complex array of tattoos, which served as a criminal version of the curriculum vitae. While there was no single authoritative member the thieves governed themselves through a series of councils composed of the most senior members of the society, the *thieves-in-law*. Central to the system, was the steadfast refusal to interact with the society outside of the *thieves' world*, both within and without of the prison system. One could steal from outside but never cooperate or receive favors from members of legitimate societies, to do so would bring shame and punishment.<sup>215</sup>

Soviet era prison authors, such as Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Varlam Shalamov, describe aspects of the *thieves' world* and its members. Solzhenitsyn noted, "to them prison is their native home" referring to members of the *thieves' world* and their rejection of society. Varlam Shalamov adds his own observation of the conduct of the members of the *thieves' world* in several of his short stories. Shalamov illustrates the manner by which the *thieves* survived in his story "On Tick." In the story, a *thief* and one of the guards play cards for the possessions of another inmate. The *thief* consistently wins amassing the possessions of the guard and an inmate, ultimately resulting in the inmate's death, after which the *thief* casually departs.<sup>216</sup>

The ideal of the *thieves' world* began to break down during the 1940s for a combination of factors, the most significant of which was a change in the demographics

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<sup>213</sup> Mark Galeotti, "Criminal Russia: the Traditions Behind the Headlines," 5.

<sup>214</sup> Federico Varese, "The Society of the *Vory-V-Zakone*, 1930s–1950s" in *Russian and Post-Soviet Organized Crime* ed. Mark Galeotti (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2002) 8–13.

<sup>215</sup> Federico Varese, "The Society of the *Vory-V-Zakone*, 1930s–1950s," 8–14.

<sup>216</sup> Varlam Shalamov, "On Tick" in *Kolyma Tales*, translated by John Glad (London: Penguin Books, 1994), 5–10.

and size of the prison population. Through the 1940s, there was an initial decrease in prison population largely resulting from the formation of penal battalions; however, this did not last long. Between 1944 and 1946, the prison population rose 40 percent from 1.4 million to 1.7 million inmates. The trend continued until 1953, when the population of Soviet prisons peaked at 2.45 million inmates.<sup>217</sup> The demographic make-up of the inmates changed as well during this timeframe. There was an increase in the percentage of repressed nationalities, to include the Chechens.<sup>218</sup>

One of the byproducts of the increase in the size and diversity of the prison population was a corresponding increase in the difficulty to manage it. In the larger context, the prison system was divided into criminals and political prisoners. The criminal portion was further divided into members of the *thieves' world* and 'renegades' or 'bitches'.<sup>219</sup> In an effort to manage the growing political prisoner population, the GULAG officials turned to criminal members outside of the *thieves' world* to manage the daily operations.<sup>220</sup>

Varlam Shalamov describes such an arrangement in his short story "My First Tooth."<sup>221</sup> This story depicts a criminal overseer who knocks out one of Shalamov's protagonist's teeth as punishment for a minor infraction of the prison rules. What Shalamov described was likely the interaction between a 'renegade' and a political prisoner. The arrangement described by Shalamov would not have occurred between a member of the *thieves' world* and a political prisoner for the simple fact that no *thief* would have collaborated with the officials in running the camp.

It was this collaboration that brought the *thieves' world* to near extinction. It began with the return of inmates many former members of the *thieves' world* who had served in the Red Army. Many of these returning criminals attempted to reenter the

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<sup>217</sup> Federico Varese, "The Society of the *Vory-V-Zakone*, 1930s–1950s," 19.

<sup>218</sup> Federico Varese, "The Society of the *Vory-V-Zakone*, 1930s–1950s," 19.

<sup>219</sup> Tanya Frisby, "The Rise of Organized Crime in Russia: Its Roots and Social Significance," 33.

<sup>220</sup> Tanya Frisby, "The Rise of Organized Crime in Russia: Its Roots and Social Significance," 32–33

<sup>221</sup> Varlam Shalamov, "My First Tooth" in *Kolyma Tales*, translated by John Glad (London: Penguin Books, 1994), 380–387.

ranks of the *thieves' world* but were barred and labeled traitors or bitches. The conflict quickly escalated into a battle to the death throughout the prison system.<sup>222</sup> In the five years of the fighting, later to be known as the Scab War, nearly all the traditional *thieves-in-law* were killed.<sup>223</sup> It was at the brink of oblivion that, “a peculiar phenomenon occurred: ordinary criminals began to sympathize with the traditional *thieves-in-law*” and a myth was born.<sup>224</sup> This sympathy allowed their code survived although in a modified form.

The new members of the *thieves' world* had a more expansive view of the field of criminal endeavors. They were no longer limited to crimes that could be conducted within the prison system or the more traditional pastimes. The new criminal element was characterized as generally more flexible in thought, possessing better intelligence collection methods and a more astute judge of character.<sup>225</sup> Cooperation with government officials was now permissible under the new framework, this would further the possibility of crimes outside of the penal system, especially during the increasingly corrupt Brezhnev era.<sup>226</sup>

### C. CHECHENS ENTER THE THIEVES' WORLD

It was during the final stages of the traditional *thieves' world* and the beginning of its new iteration that the Chechens arrived to the prisons in large numbers. This was primarily due to the deportation of 1944, where many Chechen males ended up in the prison system. As an ethnicity, the Chechens continued their resistance to Soviet authority. Alexander Solzhenitsyn commented on the Chechen's resistance, “Only one nation refused to accept the psychology of submission ...The Chechens.”<sup>227</sup> As further evidence of the intractability of the Chechens, Vanora Bennett cites a GULAG returnee,

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<sup>222</sup> Joseph Serio, *Investigating the Russian Mafia*, 152–153.

<sup>223</sup> Federico Varese, “The Society of the *Vory-V-Zakone*, 1930s–1950s,” 7.

<sup>224</sup> Federico Varese, “The Society of the *Vory-V-Zakone*, 1930s–1950s,” 23.

<sup>225</sup> Joseph Serio, *Investigating the Russian Mafia*, 166–167.

<sup>226</sup> Joseph Serio, *Investigating the Russian Mafia*, 166.

<sup>227</sup> Alexandr Solzhenitsyn Quoted in Svante E Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2001), 199.

“sometimes (they) would try to split up families or take away our rights...but then they’d be found dead on the highway...and after a while they learned to treat us with respect.”<sup>228</sup>

Bound together by ethnic bonds, and possessing a more than healthy dose of animosity toward the Soviet leadership, involvement in a criminal network was likely a perfect fit for the eternal Chechen underdog rebel. As members of this new criminal fraternity the Chechens were brought into contact with other members of the Soviet criminal world. These relationships would prove to be beneficial when the population of the GULAG was reduced in conjunction with Khrushchev’s de-Stalinization efforts.<sup>229</sup>

In the 1970s, with the Soviet economy self-destructing and the demand for consumer goods increasing, there existed an ideal situation for a disciplined criminal organization to thrive. In response to consumer demands, black markets steadily expanded. In addition to the growth of black markets, a shadow economy sprang into existence. The shadow economy consisted of consumer goods created from stolen state resources. The shadow businessmen lacked protection and a means to bring their goods to market, enter the professional criminals.<sup>230</sup> In addition to distribution and protection the nascent businessmen needed a mechanism to arbitrate disputes and enforce contracts.<sup>231</sup> Both tasks were tailor made for members of the *thieves’ world*, as they had been doing it for the past fifty years. Arrangements were made as early as the 1950s, and expanded in the early 1980s, for the merger of soon to be oligarchs and organized crime elements, of which the Chechens were one.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Svante E. Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2001), 199.

<sup>229</sup> Tanya Frisby, "The Rise of Organized Crime in Russia: Its Roots and Social Significance," 33.

<sup>230</sup> Tanya Frisby, "The Rise of Organized Crime in Russia: Its Roots and Social Significance," 33.

<sup>231</sup> Misha Glenny, *McMafia*, 59.

<sup>232</sup> Katya Vladimirov, "Red Buccaneers: Soviet Criminal Enterprises, 1950s" *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 35 (2001): 267–277. In her article "Red Buccaneers: Soviet Criminal Enterprises, 1950s" Katya Vladimirov traces the intertwined relationship of corrupt managers of the burgeoning "shadow economy" and the traditional organized criminals back to the 1950s. It would appear that while the arrangements may have dated back this far they were limited in scope. Not until the culmination of the Scab Wars would there have been the necessary shift in the leadership of the *thieves’ world* to facilitate the cooperation with any form of authority figure.

Owing to their situation in the wake of the 1944 deportation, the Chechen community possessed several attributes that allowed them to succeed in Soviet organized crime. The deportation left an indelible mark on every Chechen until the present, serving to unite them as one people.<sup>233</sup> Chechen nationalism was forged under some of the most arduous conditions, not entirely unlike those that served to crystallize Armenian and Jewish identities. There was a second unintended effect of the relocation of Chechens. By spreading the Chechen population throughout Central Asia and Siberia, Stalin created a scattered network of ethnic enclaves.<sup>234</sup> Continued demonization by mainstream Russian society, served to further isolate the Chechens, forcing them to turn further inward to the exclusion of Soviet society. By the end of 1994, only one sixth of those Chechen families deported in 1944 had been given permanent housing.<sup>235</sup> Chechens as a whole continued to resist Stalin's 'socialist culture', to the point that assimilation into Soviet society was nearly impossible.<sup>236</sup>

Barred from entry into legitimate Soviet society and forced to endure extreme hardship, Chechens had no option but to increase their self-reliance and turn to crime as a means of survival.<sup>237</sup> The fact that crime, as defined by the Soviet system, did not carry the same social stigma within Chechen society does not lessen their act of social protest. In a real life debate between Hobsbawm and Blok, the Chechens acted as a foil to a series of Soviet rulers, but were only able to do so with the assistance of corrupt bureaucrats.<sup>238</sup>

After Stalin's death, many of the restrictions imposed on the deported were gradually lifted. Slowly the state acknowledged the flow of illegal migration back to Chechnya. This migration generally coincided with Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin's excesses. What started as a small flow in 1954, resulted in a massive rush by

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<sup>233</sup> Ryan Gingeras, "Lecture: Russia: Origins of the Red Godfathers," (lecture, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, September 8, 2010).

<sup>234</sup> Svante E Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers*, 198.

<sup>235</sup> Svante E Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers*, 199

<sup>236</sup> John Russell, "Terrorists, Bandits, Spooks and Thieves," 104

<sup>237</sup> John Russell, "Terrorists, Bandits, Spooks and Thieves," 104.

<sup>238</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981) and Anton Blok, "The Peasant and the Brigand: Social Banditry Reconsidered" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 14 (1972): 494–503.

1959 remapping the demographic make-up of Chechnya.<sup>239</sup> Many of those deported returned to a radically different homeland. The mass return did not equate to all Chechens, many remained in their deported locations while others continually gravitated to the growing Russian cities.<sup>240</sup> Those that did return home were often subjected to forced seasonal migration in support of Soviet agriculture efforts.<sup>241</sup>

Those Chechens who ended up in large Russian cities were often confined to ethnic slums. Situations not unlike those of immigrants to America led to the development of unique ethnic enclaves, supported by an ethnic self-help system. The presence of an ethnic group in a given city would in turn provide a pull for others to migrate in search of work. The reciprocal forces of forced migration and an ethnic pull further spread the Chechen population throughout the Soviet Union. The self-help mentality fostered the generation of ethnic gangs for the express purpose of protecting ethnic interests.<sup>242</sup>

Chechen criminal elements had exploited gaps in the Soviet system to the greatest extent possible; maximizing adversities experienced by their ethnicity and taking social isolation and ethnic solidarity in the only direction possible, into a wider criminal endeavor. The Chechens were uniquely postured to take advantage of the chaotic environment of the Russian 1990s. With established ethnic populations in the major Russian and Central Asian cities, linked together by a common ethnic bond, Chechen gangs were able to offer services that Russia could not. In many cases, the Chechens were able to straddle the gap between the legitimate and illegitimate Russia, due in part to the Soviet affirmative action programs. With influence across the region and a reputation

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<sup>239</sup> Svante E Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers*, 202

<sup>240</sup> Svante E Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers*, 203

<sup>241</sup> Svante E Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers*, 203

<sup>242</sup> Ryan Gingeras, "Russia: Origins of the Red Godfathers." (lecture, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, September 8, 2010).



for loyalty and violence, it is no wonder rising oligarchs such as Boris Berezovsky turned to the Chechens to help further his economic endeavors.<sup>243</sup>

#### **D. FALL OF THE SOVIET UNION AND THE RISE OF ORGANIZED CRIME**

Social and economic conditions continued to deteriorate in the Soviet Union through the 1980s. A highly centralized economy, in which Moscow controlled, or thought they controlled, all fields of human endeavor proved incapable of competing in a global free-market. In response to an ever-decreasing supply of consumer goods, enterprising organizations contributed to a growing grey and black economy. Money played a minor role within this economic structure, those organizations that could facilitate the acquisition and transportation of tangible commodities gained prominence, the Chechens were one such group.<sup>244</sup>

As the old social structure rapidly eroded, Russian citizens relied more upon interpersonal bonds and established relationships for stability and security.<sup>245</sup> Frisby notes that the growth of the free market system in Russia served to undermine interpersonal relationships, replacing collective support with self-interest.<sup>246</sup> The *thieves' world* was not immune to this phenomenon; the code that governed their world even in its adapted form was gradually supplanted for with the quest for personal wealth.<sup>247</sup> The Chechen community was one of the few to successfully maintain collective support

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<sup>243</sup> Paul Klebnikov, "Godfather of the Kremlin?" *Forbes.com*, December 30, 1996, <http://www.forbes.com/forbes/1996/1230/5815090a.html> (accessed April 18, 2001). In his article Klebnikov draws a connection between Boris Berezovsky and a Chechen organized crime group. Allegedly Berezovsky had hired the Chechens for protection and to expand his auto dealerships. The relationship worked smoothly until another organized crime element attempted to muscle in on the deal.

<sup>244</sup> Tsyarkin, Mikhail. "Soviet Economic System and Social Crisis." (lecture, Naval Postgraduate School, January 20, 2010).

<sup>245</sup> Tanya Frisby, "The Rise of Organized Crime in Russia: Its Roots and Social Significance," 30.

<sup>246</sup> Tanya Frisby, "The Rise of Organized Crime in Russia: Its Roots and Social Significance," 31.

<sup>247</sup> Vsevolod Sokolov, "From Guns to Briefcases: The Evolution of Russian Organized Crime" *World Policy Journal* 21 (2004): 69.

within a free-market economy. Local Chechen gangs retained their ethnic identity and connections with other Chechen gangs, in a network of mutually beneficial arrangements.<sup>248</sup>

The Soviet system of criminal justice was insufficient to address the evolving nature of crime throughout the country. The state could no longer resort to deporting or incarcerating entire sections of the population as a means of control.<sup>249</sup> The spread of a market economy was concurrent with new activities that were formerly not considered to be criminal, mainly because they had no place in the Soviet command economy. Legal and administrative regulations were not sufficiently adaptive to deal with the evolving social and economic developments, mainly because the problems now arising were outside the conception of most of the Russian bureaucracy. Combined with an inflexible legal system, the hyperinflation of the 1990s decreased the ability and desire of law enforcement agencies at all levels to effectively address the changing security environment.<sup>250</sup> Corruption, which was always a present factor in Russia, rose during this period and resulted in the siphoning of operating funds from law enforcement agencies into the pockets of police leadership.<sup>251</sup> Growing violence also affected law enforcement personnel's decision on what crimes to investigate. Those crimes with a higher probability of solution and a low level of personal risk were generally pursued, often to the benefit of growing organized criminal groups.<sup>252</sup>

As official law enforcement organizations continued to atrophy, Russian citizens increasingly turned to criminals for resolution, marking the rapid rise of the, *gruppировки*, (street gang).<sup>253</sup> The growth of these organizations, of which the Chechens were the most feared, was exponential between 1991 and 1996. This was primarily due to the fact

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<sup>248</sup> Misha Glenny, *McMafia*, 64.

<sup>249</sup> Tanya Frisby, "The Rise of Organized Crime in Russia: Its Roots and Social Significance," 30.

<sup>250</sup> Misha Glenny, *McMafia*, 53–55

<sup>251</sup> Stephen Handelman, *Comrade Criminal: Russia's New Mafiya*, 286–287.

<sup>252</sup> Tanya Frisby, "The Rise of Organized Crime in Russia: Its Roots and Social Significance," 31.

<sup>253</sup> Misha Glenny, *McMafia*, 54

that the state effectively relinquished their monopoly on violence through absence.<sup>254</sup> Three major elements were becoming increasingly connected; corrupt Russian bureaucracy, wealthy oligarchs and powerful organized crime groups. Through the fall of the Soviet Union and the establishment of the Russian Federation, the bureaucracy remained intact but riddled with corruption and largely powerless. The oligarchs relying on position, charm and intelligence continued to fleece state resources while growing more wealthy and influential. The groups of organized criminals provided a relatively secure environment and dispute resolution services necessary in a market without effective legal strictures.<sup>255</sup>

Gorbachev's 1988 policy of cooperatives codified the birth of a new capitalist class. In practice this policy did little more than bring to light existing grey market practices; letting communist directors who had access to state resources to turn their position into more tangible assets, primarily in the form of U.S. dollars.<sup>256</sup>

Aggressive competition was the theme through the 1990s. In this chaotic capitalist free-for-all rising oligarchs were often more concerned with competing oligarchs. They feared the treachery of competitors, and in some cases allies, more than they feared the growing organized criminals.<sup>257</sup> These calculations combined with the need for a "roof" strengthened the oligarch/criminal arrangements.

A reliable "roof" was critical for an emerging entrepreneur. In many cases a businessman was willing to pay up to 30 percent of his profits for an effective "roof." In exchange for the pay, street gangs would ensure the businessman could continue to operate free from the influence of rival competitors or criminal interference. The effectiveness of the "roof" deepened upon the leadership of the group providing it, not all were equal to the challenge of operating in an evolving capitalist Russia.<sup>258</sup> It was not

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<sup>254</sup> Misha Glenny, *McMafia*, 58

<sup>255</sup> Vsevolod Sokolov, "From Guns to Briefcases: The Evolution of Russian Organized Crime," 70–71.

<sup>256</sup> David E. Hoffman, *The Oligarchs: Wealth and Power in the New Russia* (New York: Public Affairs, 2003), 39

<sup>257</sup> Tanya Frisby, "The Rise of Organized Crime in Russia: Its Roots and Social Significance," 29

<sup>258</sup> Misha Glenny, *McMafia*, 55.

only the growing organized crime elements that provided a “roof” law enforcement personnel would also serve this function often forming joint roofs with criminal elements.<sup>259</sup> Again, the Chechens with countrywide connections, deep loyalty and a capacity for ruthlessness rose to the top. Rival street gangs and businessmen alike respected the Chechen reputation for fearlessness and violence.<sup>260</sup>

Throughout the late 1980s and 1990s, the relationship between businessmen, corrupt officials and organized crime deepened. Each element was growing more powerful in political terms but more significantly in economic terms. The rising oligarchs needed the protection of the gangsters to make and then retain their wealth, in turn the criminals flourished.<sup>261</sup> As Glenny notes, “the richer the oligarch, the bigger and wealthier his protectors—mutually assured wealth creation.”<sup>262</sup> Chechen organized crime elements were prevalent within this arrangement providing protection to wealthy but they had other business interests as well.

In the late 1980s, reports of Chechen involvement in auto dealerships were surfacing. Violent conflict had opened between Chechen groups and at least two Slavic organized crime groups, the Lyubers and the Solntsevo.<sup>263</sup> The auto dealerships in dispute were allegedly tied to Russian oligarch Boris Berezovsky. In an effort to work out the arrangement, the groups had a ‘conversation’ outside a Logovaz showroom resulting in the death of six Chechens and four Russians.<sup>264</sup> For the Chechens, there was a significant financial interest at stake, protecting auto dealerships had transitioned into selling and transporting stolen or appropriated vehicles. This trade in part boosted the Chechens to one of the wealthiest criminal groups in Moscow.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Vsevolod Sokolov, “From Guns to Briefcases: The Evolution of Russian Organized Crime,” 70.

<sup>260</sup> Misha Glenny, *McMafia*, 62.

<sup>261</sup> Misha Glenny, *McMafia*, 60.

<sup>262</sup> Misha Glenny, *McMafia*, 60.

<sup>263</sup> Misha Glenny, *McMafia*, 65; Joseph Serio, *Investigating the Russian Mafia*, 188.

<sup>264</sup> Paul Klebnikov, “Godfather of the Kremlin?” *Forbes.com*, December 30, 1996, <http://www.forbes.com/forbes/1996/1230/5815090a.html> (accessed April 18, 2001).

<sup>265</sup> Stephen Handelman, *Comrade Criminal: Russia's New Mafiya*, 49.

Trafficking in stolen vehicle was a good source of revenue for the Chechen groups, but in the 1990s, they moved into other more lucrative activities. Chechen involvement in drug trafficking particularly narcotics emerged in the 1990s and provided a significant source of income for Chechen criminal groups. Taking advantage of Chechens communities throughout the Russia and corrupt officials, criminal groups were able to extend their narcotics across the country.<sup>266</sup>

Drug trafficking was augmented by weapons trafficking much of which was facilitated through a collaboration between organized crime groups and Russian military personnel. A significant portion of the weapons entering the black market originated from the Trans-Caucasus Military District.<sup>267</sup> Again, Chechen organized crime elements capitalized upon their unique combination of attributes, close-knit communities, extra-legal existence and proximity to an enormous source of weapons. Almost anything was for sale in the early 90s, Thomas Goltz reports experiencing a Chechen arms bazaar on a trip to Grozny, where merchants hawked anything from Kalashnikovs to BRDMs.<sup>268</sup> The end result of this diversification in activities was an extremely wealthy network of Chechen criminal groups, who were connected to equally influential bureaucrats and businessmen.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

Modern Chechen organized crime is neither new nor unprecedented. It developed from the merger of historic experiences and the introduction to an existing Russian organized crime structure. Faced with competition between empires and the subsequent set of dualities that the competition set in motion, Chechens play the only role they were equipped to play, that of the intractable rebel. This role of rebel ingratiated them into the Soviet criminal world. Soviet policies and continued demonization further solidified the Chechen identity as one existing outside of Soviet society, while at the same time

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<sup>266</sup> Library of Congress, "Involvement of Russian Organized Crime Syndicates, Criminal Elements in the Russian Military, and Regional Terrorist Groups in Narcotics Trafficking in Central Asia, The Caucasus, and Chechnya," by Glenn E. Curtis, Washington, D.C., 2002, 23–25

<sup>267</sup> Stephen Handelman, *Comrade Criminal: Russia's New Mafiya*, 209.

<sup>268</sup> Thomas Goltz, *Chechnya Diary*, 46.

spreading its people far from the confines of the North Caucasus. Later generations of Chechens would exploit this dispersion. Furthermore, the conditions within the Soviet police state and command economy provided the Chechens with connections and a niche in society. It was a decidedly criminal niche but allowed Chechen criminal groups to amass connections, power and wealth. These connections and services were in critical demand during the emerging Russian market system. On the eve of Dudayev's putsch the Chechen criminal elements were poised to support the effort for a Chechen bid for independence.

## **V. NOT-SO-STRANGE BEDFELLOWS: THE MERGER OF CHECHEN ORGANIZED CRIME AND THE INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT**

Dudayev's leadership was excellent and his timing, the key behind any successful revolution, superb. Yeltsin may not have been impressed but Trotsky and Stalin certainly would have been—not only by the revolution's organization, but also by its fusion of politics and criminality.<sup>269</sup>

Well before the first Russo-Chechen War, the stage had been set for the merger of a nascent government structure within Chechnya and various ethnic organized criminal elements. It would be an arrangement that supported all parties in economic, political and security terms. The burgeoning relationship was founded on more than just a simple rational calculation of cost and benefit, although this was a significant factor. It grew out of a common understanding of ethnic identity and the myth of a pre-existing Chechen state. Interestingly, a degree of similarity existed between nineteenth century Chechen attempts to establish a balance between subject and sovereign within the Russian Empire and the twentieth century attempts.<sup>270</sup> However, in the late twentieth century economic preconditions were such that the outcome and the manner, by which the events unfolded, produced radically different results.

Previous attempts at solidifying the Chechens into a formal government had been uniformly unsuccessful. This trend would ultimately continue with the former Soviet Air Force general turned Chechen president, Djohar Dudayev's attempt at Chechen independence. However, there were significant similarities between Dudayev and previous Chechen leaders. Dudayev would have to seize power in a political system comprised of Moscow puppets and fractious warlords. In order to secure his position Dudayev needed support to get the necessary support he would have to make a series of alliances with powerful Chechen elements, many of which were criminal. As in the past, Dudayev would pit an organically derived form of Chechen government from one

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<sup>269</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 111.

<sup>270</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 117.

imposed upon the Chechens from Moscow. The eventual criminality of the Dudayev regime would be influenced by historical perceptions of Chechens, but more so by contemporary actions and alliances.

Chechen criminality, or the perception of it, had steadily grown since the first Russo-Chechen contact. Imperial authors painted the Chechens as an amalgamation of noble savages and cutthroat bandits. This perception was continued through the Soviet time, and built upon by both continued Chechen resistance to control from Moscow and their ruthless conduct inside the GULAG. As the Soviet Union settled deeper into a morass of corruption, Chechen criminality was confirmed through their participation in the growing black and grey markets. It was participation in these illegal economic sectors that facilitated the growth of a wealthy Chechen organized crime network.

Chechen organized crime elements would play a critical role in the attempt to form an independent Chechen state during the collapse of the Soviet Union. In previous attempts at state formation, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there was no equivalent to an international, wealthy organized crime element. While criminal groups were not the sole reason for Chechen military victories over the Russian Army, the weapons and support they provided did assist.

Criminal elements were able to amass the amount of influence they had because of economic and political connections cemented during the break-up of the Soviet Union. Chechen crime elements had spread throughout the former Soviet Union and beyond. In the process of expansion they had developed connections to some of the most powerful economic and political figures in the new Russian Federation. Through these connections the Chechens criminals were able to build upon an already substantial amount of wealth. Extreme wealth, robust logistics and international connections were all capabilities that any independent regime in Chechnya needed.

The rise of Dudayev and the corresponding rise of Chechen criminal elements created a situation in which all parties could benefit. It was this perceived symbiotic relationship that drew powerful Chechen criminals to support Dudayev's bid for independence. Some of the attraction to Dudayev may have been associated with his



inflammatory rhetoric and the lack of Moscow ties. However, from the criminal standpoint the possibility of a safe haven, the potential to launder illegal revenues and the possibility of new criminal enterprises outweighed ethnic solidarity and hatred of Moscow. This flexible calculation of cost and benefits would produce a fickle alliance, with criminals supporting the politician who could best further their interests.

#### **A. CRIME AND STATE: A THEORETICAL CONSTRUCT**

Crime is a phenomenon that is deeply tied to the society from which it originates. It has roots in the society's concept of what construes acceptable behavior. These perceptions are in turn derived from environmental and social conditions. Acts considered criminal in one part of the world may not necessarily be perceived as criminal in another region that does not share common environmental, moral, and social factors. Criminologists have been struggling with the origins and manifestations of criminality since the inception of criminology as a scientific discipline. Throughout the twentieth century criminology has been working on the link between crime, society and governmental forces and gradually taking a more holistic view of the phenomenon.<sup>271</sup>

In examining the crime-state nexus in Chechnya, crime needs to be viewed from several perspectives. First, crime is an organic social process meaning that it is directly tied to the society that defines it.<sup>272</sup> In the case of Chechnya there are two competing societies, the local Chechen community and the larger Russian society. The dual communities are a byproduct of the extended Russo-Chechen relationship. As much, the Chechens have wanted independence they have been welded to the Russian community over the past 200 years, and will likely continue to be so for the foreseeable future.

Second, there is essentially no economic distinction between political corruption and organized crime, both served to promote their own interests normally working together to do so. Organized criminals contribute to the campaigns of favorable politicians with the expectation of reciprocation. Corrupted politicians for their part

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<sup>271</sup> Alan A. Block and William J. Chambliss, *Organizing Crime*, 2–3.

<sup>272</sup> F. Tannenbaum, *Crime and the Community* (Boston, MA: Ginn & Co., 1978), Quoted in Alan A. Block and William J. Chambliss, *Organizing Crime* (New York: Elsevier Science Publishing, 1981), 3.

ensure favorable regulatory conditions exist to further organized crime's activities.<sup>273</sup> At the heart of the relationship is a mutually beneficial arrangement, one that is subject to revaluation and change by either side if the cost-benefit equation becomes out of balance.

The mutually beneficial and reinforcing relationship described above needed a beginning. A successful state-maker needed the support of competent and successful criminals who would in turn need the support of an entrenched politician. In Chechnya, it can rapidly become a chicken and egg argument, except for the unique social and economic environment present during the fall of the Soviet Union. In this specific case, it was the powerful criminal elements that provided the necessary catalyst to start the cycle. From this point onward, the reciprocal relationship held sway. As criminal elements grew more successful, they required increased protection from corrupted government officials.<sup>274</sup> In the relationship that developed money was the prime motivator for both politicians and criminals.

Third, outside of an economic construct state-making relies heavily upon coercion, specifically, the monopoly upon the legitimate use of violence. Inherent to this concept are two aspects, the capacity to monopolize violence and a perception of legitimacy from within and without the designated territory. Charles Tilly drew an analogy between the consolidation of a state and an organized crime protection racket as an explanation of state formation in Western Europe. The analogy can be taken more literally in the case of Chechnya. Where in Europe it was the military that provided the muscle, in Chechnya it was organized criminal elements skilled in the operations of protection rackets that provided the muscle.<sup>275</sup>

Tilly developed his theoretical structure to explain the process of state consolidation in Western Europe and warns against applying it directly to situations in

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<sup>273</sup> R. K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (New York: Free Press, 1968), Quoted in Alan A. Block and William J. Chambliss, *Organizing Crime* (New York: Elsevier Science Publishing, 1981), 3–4.

<sup>274</sup> Anton Blok, "The Peasant and the Brigand: Social Banditry Reconsidered," 498. Blok argues that criminals need a degree of protection from powerful authority structures. While his argument is structured to counter Erik Hobsbawm's concept of social banditry the core of the argument remains valid for discussion of organized crime in throughout Russia and Chechnya.

<sup>275</sup> Charles Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," 169–170.

the contemporary “Third World.” It is true that the social and economic conditions in Chechnya of the 1980s and 1990s differed significantly from that of sixteenth century Europe. However, there are some important parallels that remain germane to our discussion, in Chechnya during the 1980s and 1990s like in sixteenth century Europe there was a contest over control of a territory, its people and resources. In both situations the conflict was played out largely through the use of armed elements in an effort to subdue rivals and cow the population. In both there were instances where armed elements became integral to the developing political process.<sup>276</sup>

Tilly offers two general paths by which the monopoly on violence is achieved by a state. The first way is through the establishment of a powerful military, one that is capable of subduing and then disarming rival militaries. This construct is roughly a center-out process. Alternatively, a political leader who is militarily weaker can opt to ally with an armed element. Often times these armed elements are outlaws, as with the Robin Hood myth. Over an extended period of time this alliance becomes formalized and the outlaws are recast as integral elements of the government.<sup>277</sup> The second route becomes essentially a periphery-in process.

Chechnya represents a contemporary example of both paths. Moscow attempted to undertake both the center-out process through the use of the military, while attempting a periphery-in process through negotiations with armed elements, Dudayev and his supporters. Dudayev attempted the periphery-in process by allying with armed criminal and tribal groups. The process of integration in Tilly’s second option occurs over generations. In Chechnya the processes occurred in the extended cases over several years and in some cases over the course of several months.

It was the manner of incorporation of criminal elements into the Chechen Republics structures that is most significant. The integration of criminal elements and bureaucrats occurred within the framework of an “Iron Triangle.”<sup>278</sup> In essence, the

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<sup>276</sup> Charles Tilly, “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime,” 170–173.

<sup>277</sup> Charles Tilly, “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime,” 173.

<sup>278</sup> William H. Webster, ed. *Russian Organized Crime: Global Organized Crime Project* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1997), 89.

“Iron Triangle” depicts the relationship between three prominent groups that emerged during the final years of the Soviet Union: businessmen, bureaucrats, and organized criminals. Each group stood to gain a significant amount of wealth and thereby power in the emerging capitalist system. Aside from a perversion of a free market model, major problems arose as the lines between the groups began to blur. In many cases, the distinction eroded completely until all three groups were embodied into a single entity or group. This was to be the fate of Chechnya; criminal elements worked themselves into positions of authority and used those positions to further their own interests.<sup>279</sup>

## **B. KEY PLAYERS IN THE STATE-CRIMINAL-BUSINESS NEXUS**

The thread linking the analytical theories together is a rational assessment of costs and benefits by the key participants. It is impossible to get into the heads of the various members involved in Dudayev’s bid for independence so we will likely never know the true motives behind their actions. Criminals are not generally given to writing memoirs and rebel leaders tend not to write much either. Lacking detailed autobiographies, we are left with a theoretical framework of a rational actor and several instances that support the profit-maximizing viewpoint of Chechen criminals and politicians.

How did Dudayev, a relative unknown in Chechnya, build significant political and military support to seize control of the republic? At the core of this question’s answer is the first indicator towards a symbiotic relationship between crime and politics, corruptibility. Born in 1944, Dudayev was a product of the Chechen deportation. He spent most of his childhood in Kazakhstan before returning to the Chechen homeland, reportedly to a house filled with strangers.<sup>280</sup> Entering into the military Dudayev took advantage of Soviet affirmative action efforts being one of the few Chechens ever to reach a senior military rank.<sup>281</sup> He served with distinction in the Soviet military

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<sup>279</sup> Joseph D Serio, *Investigating the Russian Mafia*, 233–251. Serio provides a concise and understandable summation of the operation and evolution of the “Iron Triangle” in a Russian setting. A Chechen example can be seen in the evolution of the relationship between Dudayev and Ruslan Labazonov, his head of security and known criminal. Labazonov provided personal security for Dudayev and likely other services but eventually defected to the Russia side receiving a colonelship

<sup>280</sup> Stephen Handelman, *Comrade Criminal: Russia’s New Mafiya*, 215.

<sup>281</sup> Stephen Handelman, *Comrade Criminal: Russia’s New Mafiya*, 214.

achieving recognition as both a pilot and a garrison commander. It was his final assignment that brought him into personal contact with both revolution and the leaders of Russia.<sup>282</sup>

Dudayev seemed to have several qualities appealing to a nationalistic Chechen constituency. He had first hand experience with a successful bid for national independence owing to his experience in Estonia. Dudayev was a general in the Soviet Air Force, no small feat. Achieving this position would seem to imply that Dudayev was intelligence and politically savvy. Finally, he was thought to have a high degree of organizational skill derived from his 30-year career in the military.<sup>283</sup>

All of the aforementioned criteria would certainly put Dudayev on solid ground as a revolutionary Chechen leader. But there were likely additional factors that the nationalistic All-National Congress of Chechen Peoples (OKChN) thought were significant. Before expanding upon the less obvious considerations it is necessary to characterize the OKChN. This body was composed of “a coalition of Chechnya’s tiny middle class and intelligentsia, Chechen businessmen and Moscow’s Chechen community.”<sup>284</sup> Its purpose was ostensibly to unify Chechen nationals and provide a nucleus for an independent Chechen government. Under this charter, the OKChN agreed upon a ‘declaration of Chechen sovereignty’ independent of Moscow’s control.<sup>285</sup> OKChN’s policies were guided by its three most influential members, two were prominent businessmen one in Moscow and one in Chechnya, and the third would later be placed on UN Security Council’s blacklist of al-Qaeda related suspects.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 92. While assigned as garrison commander of the Tallinn Airfield Estonia Dudayev stated he would block the flight of Soviet troops into Estonia. Additionally, in response to a potential “accident” with Yeltsin’s aircraft Dudayev had his staff car drive Yeltsin back to Leningrad.

<sup>283</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 92.

<sup>284</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 90.

<sup>285</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 90.

<sup>286</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 90.; Andrew McGreagor, “The Assassination of Selimkhan Yandarbiyev: Implications for the War on Terrorism” *Terrorism Monitor*, July, 14, 2004, under “A Theorist of Jihad,” [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no\\_cache=1&tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=30107](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=30107) (accessed 30 April 2011).

When looking at the composition of OKChN the fact that a majority of the members were businessmen is significant. Of all the groups of individuals comprising post-Soviet society businessmen were the most likely to come into sustained contact with members of organized crime groups. In many cases, the businessmen and criminals were one and the same.<sup>287</sup> As mentioned previously, integral to the conduct of business in Russia was the establishment of a ‘roof’, the uniquely Russian term for racketeering. Of the nearly 1,000 members present at OKChN inaugural meeting most would have had some connection to organized crime groups if they were not active members of crime groups.<sup>288</sup>

What was it that attracted a group of nascent businessmen and possible criminals to a Soviet Air Force general? Aside from possessing the perceived organizational skills and military credentials previously mentioned, Dudayev bore a striking similarity to the infamous Imam Shamil. These similarities were enhanced by his inflammatory anti-Russian rhetoric and references to Chechens rebellious past and the Chechens shared tribulations. While the Russian hatred and images of the past were strong emotional motivators there may have been other more practical reasons for Dudayev’s selection. He was perceived as a lesser threat when compared to other aspiring leaders in Chechnya, mainly because of his lack of connection to the republic. He had spent nearly his entire adult life in the Soviet military and therefore did not have an extensive network of supporters within the republic. The lack of popular support networks within Chechnya would presumably force Dudayev to rely upon OKChN members. Additionally, his family’s origins could be traced back to a small and politically insignificant clan,

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<sup>287</sup> Vsevolod Sokolov, “From Guns to Briefcases: The Evolution of Russian Organized Crime,” 72–73. Sokolov notes the merger between criminal and businessman was not the only extent of the consolidation, but it extended into the bureaucracy. The lines between criminals, businessmen and bureaucrats were blurring and would continue to do so. This matches Joseph Serio’s concept of the “Iron Triangle” discussed later in this chapter.

<sup>288</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 90. The membership and dates of OKChN’s initial meeting was drawn from Seely’s work. However, the implication of criminal connections was derived from a combination of factors, most significantly was the established connection between Russian businessmen, bureaucrats, and criminals noted in a wide body of literature dealing with criminality and the government in post-Soviet Russia.

preventing an independent familial powerbase. From the standpoint of the OKChN leadership these factors taken together pointed to someone who could be manipulated and then controlled.<sup>289</sup>

To one extent this perception was correct; Dudayev needed political, economic and military support to establish his authority. In this, he was forced to rely upon prominent members of OKChN many of which had dubious backgrounds. Yaragi Mamodayev, a prominent member of the petroleum and construction sector became Dudayev's chief financial supporter.<sup>290</sup> Beslan Gantemirov, a convicted criminal and paramilitary (in this instance brigand would be as appropriate of a term) leader formed the core of Dudayev's National Guard.<sup>291</sup> The National Guard would provide the muscle by which Dudayev could eliminate competing political factions consolidating his power within Chechnya. Zelimkhan Yanderbiyev, a Chechen poet who would become Chechnya's second president and later be linked to al-Qaeda, along with Yusup Soslambekov, a Moscow Chechen businessman, would serve to rally popular support for Dudayev inside and outside of Chechnya.<sup>292</sup> All four members, with the possible exception of Yanderbiyev, were in positions that would almost certainly have linked them to Chechen organized crime elements, linkages that were not severed when they moved into prominent positions in the government.

### **C. CRIME AND GOVERNMENT IN CHECHNYA: SYMBIOSIS**

Members of OKChN provided political, military and economic support needed by Dudayev. In terms of political support, Dudayev needed to be seen inside and outside of Chechnya as a popular leader. For the most part this was accomplished in the wake of the August, 1991 coup attempt in Moscow. In response to the abortive Russian coup, OKChN leaders organized demonstrations in Grozny calling for the dissolution of the

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<sup>289</sup> Svante E. Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers*, 197.

<sup>290</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 90; Svante E. Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers*, 195–196.

<sup>291</sup> Svante E. Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers*, 195–196.

<sup>292</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 90; Svante E. Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers*, 195–196.

Chechen Supreme Soviet and for power to be transferred to the OKChN executive council.<sup>293</sup> The crowds were loud and visible and seemed to be a public representation of popular support for Dudayev. However, many of the participants were reportedly motivated by money not revolutionary spirit. Protesters were reportedly paid for their attendance, and to sweeten the deal livestock was ‘constantly being prepared.’<sup>294</sup> There are few greater incentives for a rent-a-mob then a paycheck and a hot meal. Funding the protesters was beyond the financial capabilities of a former Soviet general, the money must have originated from OKChN members who in turn likely acquired it through questionable activities. It is reasonable to conclude that the initial investment in money was in anticipation of more significant future returns.

Beyond financing popular demonstration the linkage to criminal elements became more tangible. Dudayev needed muscle to capitalize on his perceived popular support. This came in the form of the National Guard, Gantermirov’s paramilitary group. The National Guard was critical in the second of Chechnya’s putsches. They fought other Chechen factions and seized key facilities throughout the republic. After several months of struggles between Dudayev and initially the pro-Russian Zavgayev and then the independent Khasbulatov the National Guard seized the Chechen ‘power ministries’ (KGB and MVD) as well as Chechen television and radio stations. National Guard forces managed to maintain control of these facilities allowing Dudayev to call for Chechen elections, which he won. These acts were not uniformly seen as extensions of the Chechen population’s desire for independence. In a comment that is strikingly reminiscent of Yermolov, General Rutskoi called the coup an act of brigandage placing the fate of Chechnya’s 300,000 inhabitants in the hands of 300 desperate, highly armed criminals.<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>293</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 99.

<sup>294</sup> Valeri Tishkov, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict*, 201, Quoted in Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000: A Deadly Embrace* (Portland, OR: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), 100.

<sup>295</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 100–107.



For Dudayev's National Guard to be effective it needed a constant supply of weapons and ammunition. This was another area where Chechen organized crime provided support to the government. As the Soviet Union began to collapse, Chechen organized crime groups were cornering the market on the illegal arms trade, as many of the sources of illegal weapons originating in the Caucasus. Throughout the Soviet Union, illegal weapon sales were a significant source of money for criminals and military officials.<sup>296</sup> A significant portion of the weapons in circulation during the 80s and 90s originated from the Trans-Caucasus Military District. According to Moscow police organized crime squad, every week nearly 10,000 illegal weapons were flowing through Grozny into the rest of the country.<sup>297</sup> It is unknown how many weapons systems were simply diverted to pro-Dudayev militias. It was not simply small arms that were stolen, in 1993 it was assessed that 'the number of artillery systems stolen from the Trans-Caucasus Military District depots amounted four times the number of stored British army artillery.'<sup>298</sup> The trade in arms continued through the first Chechen war, Thomas Goltz noted that during a 1995 trip to Grozny a senior Chechen governmental official boasted "that one could buy anything 'from a stiletto to a Stinger missile' in the local weapons bazaar."<sup>299</sup>

Weapons and protesters were not the only support criminal elements provided Dudayev. Resulting from a combination of professional exodus and mismanagement the Chechen economy fell steadily under Dudayev's leadership. To complicate the matter, Yeltsin initiated an economic embargo that was furthered by the closure of the Chechen-Georgian border. Dudayev was forced to turn increasingly to illegal economic activities and paved the way for a deepening of the "Iron Triangle" in Chechnya.<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> Stephen Handelman, *Comrade Criminal: Russia's New Mafiya*, 209.

<sup>297</sup> Stephen Handelman, *Comrade Criminal: Russia's New Mafiya*, 213.

<sup>298</sup> Caucasus officer and Western analyst quoted by Reuters quoted in Stephen Handelman, *Comrade Criminal*, 209.

<sup>299</sup> Thomas Goltz, *Chechnya Diary*, 46.

<sup>300</sup> Svante E. Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers*, 200–201.

Beginning with the consolidation of Dudayev's power and the commensurate reaffirmation of independence, the territorial status of Chechnya was ill defined. The region defaulted to a free-trade zone becoming an ideal medium for the growth of criminal entrepreneurs.<sup>301</sup> Even during the embargo 'the Grozny airport was receiving between 100–150 unsanctioned international flights per month.'<sup>302</sup> Thomas Goltz recounted his personal experience on one such flight, noting the TU-154 that carried him into Grozny through the "quasi" blockade had been stripped of seats to provide space for Chechen "suitcase businessmen" returning from the Middle East.<sup>303</sup> Two conclusions can be drawn from the continued volume of flights, first they were providing a service valuable beyond the borders of Chechnya and second the coordinators of the flights had patrons in Moscow.<sup>304</sup>

Growing external economic arrangements allowed the Chechen criminal businessmen to provide Dudayev's government a link to the international community. Chechen independence had never been recognized universally in the international arena as a result there was no possibility of establishing formal embassies abroad. Chechen Diasporas and economic activities provided a ready workaround, one that was advantageous to both sides. Chechen businessmen abroad benefitted from the favorable trade imbalance and a duty free import zone in Grozny. The government was afforded the ability to reach beyond the borders of Chechnya and engage political and economic entities. It was not always a win-win situation as was the case of the Ustinov brothers.

Ruslan and Nazarbeg Ustinov had arrived in the United Kingdom under the ostensibly diplomatic mission of coordinating the printing of currency and passports for the Chechen Republic.<sup>305</sup> Members of the government in Grozny confirmed the

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<sup>301</sup> Svante E. Cornell, "The Narcotics Threat in Greater Central Asia: From Crime-Terror Nexus to State Infiltration?" *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 4 (2006): 50.

<sup>302</sup> Svante E. Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers*, 201.

<sup>303</sup> Thomas Goltz, *Chechnya Diary*, 43–45.

<sup>304</sup> Svante E. Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers*, 201.; Thomas Goltz, *Chechnya Diary*, 43. Both Cornell and Goltz come to a similar conclusion regarding the blockade, namely that it was selectively enforced if at all. There were likely people in positions of power in Moscow who benefited from the continued flow of illicit material through Chechnya.

<sup>305</sup> Misha Glenny, *McMafia*, xiii.

Ustinov's claim of being dispatched on a legitimate diplomatic mission.<sup>306</sup> On face value, it would appear that there was some validity to the claim of legitimacy to their mission. Ruslan was one of Dudayev's trusted advisors and in this capacity, he would seem appropriate for such a diplomatic mission. However, Nazarbeg seems an odd choice for an economically focused diplomatic mission. Nazarbeg "was a martial arts expert and general muscle-for-hire" with no visible economic skills.<sup>307</sup>

It appears that there may have been a bit more to the Ustinov brother's mission in London. While they informed the British Foreign Office of their official purpose many additional indicators pointed to a different purpose. The brothers had reportedly paid £999,000 in cash for a swank four-bedroom penthouse apartment, just doors from Sherlock Holmes' old office.<sup>308</sup> It is interesting how two individuals from a poor and conflict torn region of a falling empire could afford such a sizeable outlay of cash. This was the first of several indicators that there was more to the Ustinov brothers than what they purported to the Foreign Office.

A second indicator came from the brother's extra-curricular activity and associates. From their apartment on Bakers Street, the brothers undertook some very visible and non-diplomatic activities. Wild parties were reportedly frequented by a 'stream' of call girls seemed to be the normal fair for the brothers. Aside from the prostitutes another individual in frequent attendance was a shady Armenian criminal, Ter-Oganisyan. Ter-Oganisyan was the husband of a BBC correspondent Ruslan Ustinov had met in Chechnya.<sup>309</sup> He was involved in a series of unsuccessful criminal enterprises both within the UK and the Caucasus. Ter-Oganisyan's capability as a negotiator and fixer was the basis of his employment for the Ustinov brothers; however, the three became much closer over time.<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> Stephen Handelman, *Comrade Criminal: Russia's New Mafiya*, 259.

<sup>307</sup> Misha Glenny, *McMafia*, xiii–xiv.

<sup>308</sup> Stephen Handelman, *Comrade Criminal: Russia's New Mafiya*, 255.

<sup>309</sup> Misha Glenny, *McMafia*, xiv.

<sup>310</sup> Misha Glenny, *McMafia*, xiv.

A third indicator of the brother's supplementary missions resulted from the police investigation surrounding their deaths. It seems that part of Ter-Oganisyan's duties as negotiator and fixer extended beyond relations with the British government. Ruslan had also been dispatched to negotiate for the sale of Chechen petroleum products on the world market and to secure a loan to modernize the oil industry's infrastructure. These missions appear to be beyond the skill sets of the three representatives. When factoring in the individual the Chechens were reportedly negotiating with their skills may not be too far off the mark. London newspapers identified their negotiation partner in the oil deal as an American with ties to organized crime. In what capacity the American had connections to organized crime is unclear. What is clearer is that the Chechens were also interested in arranging shipment of surface-to-air missiles. The ultimate destination for the missiles remains in doubt, some say they were intended for the Chechen militias others that they were to be sold to Azeri fighters for their conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.<sup>311</sup>

It seems that the later perception was held by Ter-Oganisyan and may have lead to the deaths of Ruslan and Nazarbeg. There was a falling out among the three individuals that left Ruslan with three holes in his head and stuffed in a wooden box. Nazarbeg was found shortly there after with similar wounds. Execution style killings are not normally the way diplomatic missions end, provided that the diplomats are in fact doing their business with other diplomats. However, if arrangements extend beyond the diplomatic circles into criminal ones then an ending such as the one the Ustinov brothers experienced becomes a distinct possibility.<sup>312</sup>

The story of the brothers does not end there. London police arrested Ter-Oganisyan and an accomplice for the murders. It appeared that forces in Grozny were displeased with the prospects of British justice and dispatched their own judges. An individual, presumed to be Chechen arrived Ter-Oganisyan's wife's sister-in-law's house with the intention of murdering Ter-Oganisyan's wife. Fortunately for her she wasn't

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<sup>311</sup> Stephen Handelman, *Comrade Criminal: Russia's New Mafiya*, 255, 259; Misha Glenny, *McMafia*, xiii–xiv.

<sup>312</sup> Stephen Handelman, *Comrade Criminal: Russia's New Mafiya*, 255.

home, unfortunately his sister-in-law was home. The assassin shot her multiple times in the head before he sped from the scene. While there may be many explanations why the sister of a BBC reporter who was married to an Armenian implicated in the death of two Chechen diplomats was murdered in her London home, the most obvious was that the murder was ordered as retribution from Grozny, specifically Dudayev.<sup>313</sup>

Such an explanation represented the deep symbiosis between the Dudayev government and organized crime elements. Both entities benefitted from the arrangement and points to a more expansive pattern of actions. Take for instance the diplomatic representatives Thomas Goltz ended up using to get into Chechnya during the first war. They were essentially extra-territorial ends of a smuggling chain. Starting in Istanbul, with 'official' and unofficial representative Goltz manages arrange being smuggled into the republic along the same route that thousands of stolen cars had previously moved.<sup>314</sup> He was able to get in largely because the pattern had been established over the preceding half decade.

Chechen criminal elements throughout the former Soviet Union had been able to move all manner of consumer goods to a willing market in Moscow at a significant mark-up. Moscow elites were able to take their cut of the profits and products as befitted a patron. Similarly, Dudayev was able to reap financial and material benefits while flaunting Moscow's embargo. While the arrangement was mutually beneficial it was not equally beneficial. Criminal entrepreneurs by far benefitted the most. They were afforded a safe haven to move illicit goods through and because of scarcity could demand a higher price. Because of their deepening position in republic's government criminal elements were able to expand into new criminal enterprises, like fraud and money laundering. Dudayev managed to capture some profit these activities but at the cost of developing a long-term stable economy.

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<sup>313</sup> Misha Glenny, *McMafia*, xiii.

<sup>314</sup> Thomas Goltz, *Chechnya Diary*, 16–26.

#### **D. CRIME AND GOVERNMENT IN CHECHNYA: PARASITISM**

Chechen organized crime elements were integral in the initial formation of a Chechen independence movement through their involvement and influence with the OKChN and support to the Dudayev government. These same elements subsequently migrated into positions of power within the government in some instances reducing the “Iron Triangle” to a single entity. It was from positions within the government that criminals were able to expand their activities along new paths. One such path involved the hijacking of state organs with the intention of embezzling funds or defrauding financial institutions.

Until the early nineties Chechen criminal elements had acquired their wealth primarily through the sales of illegal merchandise, from weapons to drugs, or from established protection rackets. With Dudayev’s declaration of independence, criminal elements in the government were able to expand into high dollar low risk fraud activities. Throughout the nineties the Russian banking system was subjected to many scams originating from the North Caucasus. Because of a lack of a secure electronic backbone and an incomplete understanding of financial security Russian banks were particularly susceptible to fraud.<sup>315</sup>

Large-scale bank fraud exploited the primitive nature of the Russian banking system. Throughout Russia each bank was in essence an isolated financial node, there were no measures in place to securely transfer funds between institutions nor did a legal framework exist to regulate the industry. To transfer funds between banks a system of *avizo* was employed. The process consisted of a client presenting an *avizo* to commercial bank requesting the release of funds. Commercial banks in turn would verify the presence of the funds with the regional payment center of the Russian Central Bank. The Central bank would verify the presence of the funds at which time the commercial bank would then release the amount requested. For the process to be circumvented officials at several levels would need to be complicit. This was apparently the case since *avizo* fraud

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<sup>315</sup> Joseph D Serio, *Investigating the Russian Mafia*, 194.

was prevalent throughout Russia in the 1990s. In Chechnya, organized crime elements utilized their positions within the government to conduct many such fraudulent activities.<sup>316</sup>

An event commonly referred to as the ‘Chechen Affair’ neatly depicts the interconnection of Chechen organized crime and the Chechen government within the financial system. A momentary lapse of dexterity thwarted what could have been the single most expansive bank robbery in the world. A Moscow patrol car observed a group of men loading heavy sacks into a parked car. One of the men tripped, dropping his sack and spilling wads of rubles. The police quickly detained the men, all of Chechen origins and confiscated more than six million rubles most still in bank wrappings.<sup>317</sup>

The men appeared unconcerned by the police attention, showing them promissory notes for additional amounts of money. Many of the notes had been drawn from banks located in Grozny and the group had been intending on redeeming them at banks throughout Russia. At the time of seizure, the notes roughly equated to seven hundred million dollars, an amount that would have brought the fledgling Russian banking system crashing down. The notes were of course false, but the fact that they were drawn using official seals from Chechen and Russian banks was certainly suspect, indicating an ability to manipulate both Chechen and Russian politics to their advantage.<sup>318</sup>

It is important to note that fraud such as the ‘Chechen Affair’ did not end with the capture of a network of criminals. When the Grozny banks were contacted, they denied ever issuing *avizos* diverting further investigatory efforts. Interestingly, shortly after the arrest of the criminals an investigator from the Chechen police appeared at the police department requesting the fraudulent *avizos* and departing with the evidence. Moscow prosecutors attempted to contact the Chechen law enforcement agency but were informed that no investigator had been sent to Moscow. Taken together, these events point to a

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<sup>316</sup> Joseph D Serio, *Investigating the Russian Mafia*, 194–196.

<sup>317</sup> Stephen Handelman, *Comrade Criminal: Russia’s New Mafia*, 131.

<sup>318</sup> Stephen Handelman, *Comrade Criminal: Russia’s New Mafia*, 131–135.

considerable effort to hide the extent of the fraud network, since it would likely have lead beyond the confines of the rebellious Chechen Republic.<sup>319</sup>

To claim that the Chechens were the only or even the most significant force in defrauding the Russian banking system would be erroneous. Non-Chechen actors were siphoning billions of dollars a year from the Russian banking system. Not only were fraud schemes a way to make significant amounts of money, they were an ideal means to launder ill-gotten gains. Funds would be quickly moved out of the country by criminal elements and deposited in liberal western banks, where the funds would be converted to dollars. Criminals conducting the transfer would get a percentage of the profits, as would the bank officials who facilitated the fraud in the first place. The prime motivator for the enterprise was money, when this motivation coincided with national independence both goals were advanced however when it clashed, it was money that won. For Chechnya the conflict over competing priorities would play a role in the fragmentation of Dudayev's independence movement.<sup>320</sup>

## **E. CONFLICTING INTERESTS**

On the eve of the first Russo-Chechen War, the Chechen economy was in shambles. The republic's oil infrastructure was dilapidated and much of the profits and products were being funneled into the pockets of private individuals. There are conflicting reports as to the extent of Dudayev's involvement, but it is unrealistic to believe he was above suspicion. In a 1993 conversation with Moscow Chechens, Dudayev reportedly claimed to have \$70 million in foreign banks.<sup>321</sup> Whether or not \$70 million was the figure Dudayev had in his accounts is immaterial, it is sufficient that the perception existed that he profited from the lawless situation in Chechnya.

Anti-Dudayev factors were growing more powerful in the run-up to the first War. Umar Avturkhanov, the leader of an anti-Dudayev militia and political party, was

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<sup>319</sup> Stephen Handelman, *Comrade Criminal: Russia's New Mafia*, 131–132.

<sup>320</sup> Joseph Serio, *Investigating the Russian Mafia*, 195–196.

<sup>321</sup> Yu V. Nikolaev, *The Chechen Tragedy – Who is to Blame?* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 1996), 24, Quoted in Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000: A Deadly Embrace* (Portland, OR: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), 184.



receiving financial and military support from Moscow. He was reportedly close to the Chechen business community in Moscow, which would imply a similar connection to organized crime elements. As most economic enterprises seek a degree of stability, the connection to Russia support would paint Avturkhanov in a more favorable light. By assuming control of the republic, he may maintain the political and economic conditions in Chechnya that had allowed criminals to acquire their wealth to date.<sup>322</sup>

Similarly, the self styled peacemaker and former Moscow favorite Ruslan Khasbulatov had made a tactical alliance with Ruslan Labazanov, the former Dudayev bodyguard and convicted criminal. In repeating the motivations of the Dudayev-criminal alliance, the criminal-state alliance between Khasbulatov and Labazanov seems most obvious. Khasbulatov needed a means of coercive force and Labazanov happened to possess such a capability. In turn, Labazanov saw to further his own financial interests by exploiting the Chechen oil sector.<sup>323</sup>

In both situations, it is possible to see the seeds of not only the military and political struggle for control of Chechnya but also the struggle for control of the criminal activities. There were significant amounts of money to be made in a criminal but relatively stable Chechnya. Criminal entrepreneurs who had missed out on the initial division of the Chechen market or those who simple wanted a bigger piece of the pie had incentives to risk supporting alternative candidates. Dudayev was turning out to be more unpredictable than originally thought. His erratic behavior was increasing the likelihood of a strong Russian response and was cutting into the profit margin of the organized crime elements. Additionally, Dudayev's ability to control Chechnya had essentially dissolved by the summer of 1994.<sup>324</sup> From this perspective he was rapidly becoming a liability instead of an asset for those interested in exploiting a lawless but relatively stable Chechnya.

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<sup>322</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 164.

<sup>323</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 165–166.

<sup>324</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 163.

The fragmentation of power within Chechnya while not entirely dependent upon conflicting criminal goals was certainly aided by this competition. The fragmentation provided an excuse for Moscow's military intervention. Realizing he lacked sufficient military power to oust Dudayev, Avturkhanov requested assistance from Moscow.<sup>325</sup> This opened the door for the eventual Russian military deployment for the first Russo-Chechen war. It would be false to say that the continuity of organized criminal enterprises was the sole reason for Russian military intervention. There were many factors that contributed to Yeltsin's decision to deploy forces in order to reestablish control over the region, but in light of the decidedly corrupt nature of both Chechen and Russian government and society, and the vast amounts of money to be made through Chechnya, criminality cannot be ruled out as a factor.

Criminality continued to play a role throughout the two Russo-Chechen wars although the nature of the conflict affected the form of criminality. The high profit-low risk activities associated with bank fraud disappeared with the first war. So too did the majority of the luxury goods smuggling since the difficulty of transporting this type of merchandise did not justify the decreasing profit margin.

Criminality did not give way to the struggle for independence, it was modified to adapt to the current environmental conditions. Organized criminal elements changed their flavor and alliances but were still present inside and outside of Chechnya. Oil theft still maintained a place in the economic portfolio of organized criminals but to a lesser extent than in the early nineties. Figures of oil theft remained high well into the 1990s, the profits of which went to various militia/crime groups.<sup>326</sup> Anna Politkovskaya noted that illegal theft of oil continued well into the second Russo-Chechen war with profits being shared between criminal elements and Russian official.<sup>327</sup> The criminal acts continued with only a change in the organization providing the roof.

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<sup>325</sup> Robert Seely, *Russo-Chechen Conflict, 1800–2000*, 162.

<sup>326</sup> Paul Murphy, *The Wolves of Islam: Russia and the Faces of Chechen Terror* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, Inc., 2006), 135–137

<sup>327</sup> Anna Politkovskaya, *A Dirty War*, 220–228.

Narcotics trafficking continued throughout both conflicts and into the present. The amount of narcotics that flows through Chechnya comprises only a fraction of the total import volumes. Yet its contribution to the black market profits of criminals cannot be discounted. Chechen fighters such as Shamil Basayev, Movladi Udugov and Khattab were operating narcotics labs as a funding source.<sup>328</sup> Unless these fighters were planning on selling the product to their own supporters a connection with a wider narcotics network was needed. For this network to function there needed to be at least some protection by individuals in power.<sup>329</sup> The networks extend throughout the Caucasus and Russia with Chechen organized criminal groups playing a continuing role.<sup>330</sup>

Beyond narcotics, embezzlement continued through the two wars and beyond. Nearly \$1 billion worth of funds to rebuild Chechnya after the first war simply disappeared. This pattern continued during the interwar period, through the second war and into the current era.<sup>331</sup> Corruption and embezzlement will not change anytime soon primarily because of the structure of the government and its relation to Moscow and need for stability. Ramzan Kadyrov must balance the desires of Moscow with those of powerful local backers. He has managed to continue a system of patronage established by his father where illegal activity is tolerated provided the government can filter a percentage of the profits and the total level does not exceed what is tolerable to Moscow.

## **F. CONCLUSION**

Chechen organized Crime became a critical factor to the bid for Chechen independence during final years of the Soviet Union. Its elements had managed to amass significant resources and connections both within inside Russia and beyond its borders. In an increasingly symbiotic manner political, business and criminal entities began to expand their activities from rudimentary protection and smuggling rackets to more sophisticated endeavors. Chechen business and criminal leaders saw the break-up of the

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<sup>328</sup> Paul Murphy, *The Wolves of Islam*, 136.

<sup>329</sup> Paul Murphy, *The Wolves of Islam*, 137.

<sup>330</sup> Colleen M. Traughber, "Terror-Crime Nexus? Terrorism and Arms, Drugs, and Human Trafficking in Georgia" *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 6 (2007): 57

<sup>331</sup> Paul Murphy, *The Wolves of Islam*, 138.

Soviet Union as the perfect situation to increase their profit potential. However, for this to occur Chechnya would need a leader who was malleable and sufficiently dependent upon the services only they could provide. Dudayev was thought to be such a leader.

Chechen criminals supported Dudayev's bid for independence with economic, political and logistics support. This support was critical to Dudayev's initial push to consolidate power within Chechnya, but would lead to several unintended consequences. Criminal support was not free; in exchange for their support Chechen criminals expected positions within the Dudayev government. From these government positions they would further both Dudayev's agenda and their own leading to the eventual collapse of legitimate Chechen economic activity. When the interests conflicted then those of the criminals won out, further compounding the economic and political situation in Chechnya. Ultimately, a re-evaluation of the cost/benefit calculation led to the fragmentation of both criminal and political power on the eve of the first Russo-Chechen war.

The crime state nexus continued to play a role in reformation of the Chechen state during and after the wars. The criminal and government relationship has reached a state of equilibrium such that a degree of stability and profitability can be maintained. Gone are the wild days of gangster capitalism to be replaced by a less profitable but more stable relationship, a condition that will likely remain for the foreseeable future.

## VI. CONCLUSION

When the name Chechnya is mentioned in conversation, it carries with it sanguine images. For many, the name evokes images of a series of bloody independence movements fought by bearded Islamic radicals. To those who have dabbled in international business or criminal studies, Chechnya brings to mind the more nefarious image of purveyors of a particularly violent form of the modern Russian protection racket. Images of Chechen organized crime are often connected with Chechen leaders or bureaucratic officials, particularly over the past several decades. Drawing the connection between the Chechen official and criminal organizations is not without basis. Chechen criminality has been an evolutionary process, one that has been influenced by internal and external factors over the past 200 years.

Chechnya has never managed to become a true nation-state in the modern context. Through the decades, its political structure has ranged from egalitarian individualism to a highly centralized police state. All of these forms have been influenced by internal and external stimuli. Centuries of relative isolation left the Chechens essentially unchanged. Early Chechen society was anarchic, comprised of small tribal communities who subsisted on a combination of agriculture and raiding. In this environment independence was not only prized it was critical for survival. It was this desire for independence that would define subsequent Chechen governments and eventually their identity.

Prolonged interaction with foreign societies would produce the first radical change in the concept of a collective Checheness. The nature of the contact with other societies produced the first changes in Chechen society. Russian imperial expansion and rule had been shaped over centuries, adapting to the requirements needed to rule an ever-expanding multi-ethnic state. The Russians preferred to co-opt regional elites instead of direct rule. A heavy use of military force was often employed to reinforce the co-option. Conquest of the Caucasus came at the end of Russian imperial expansion and was affected by an eclectic system of imperial practices, none of which fit the Chechen situation.

Simultaneous with the arrival of Russia was the slow spread of a more developed and expansive concept of Islam. Islam had made gradual inroads into Chechnya owing to the general tendency to resist any outside force. However, by the early nineteenth century it had permeated to a sufficient degree that it could be used as a unifying force. In addition to an emotional call to arms Sufi Islam provided a structure for a supra-tribal government along with the concept of a greater community. A linkage to a greater community was critical in the development of a grass-roots notion of a Chechen state, based on a common identity, and would place any such state in conflict with Russia and its artificial colonial structures.

Like the development of a Chechen state, the construction of a criminalized Chechen identity is not the product of a single era. The notion of criminality has grown throughout the course of interaction between the Russians and the Chechens. It developed out of a combination of action and reaction on the part of both Russians and Chechens. However, two events have served to crystallize the belief, Shamil's resistance and the deportation. Both events are used as touchstones by each side and provide a tangible, although subjective, explanation for Chechen criminality. Running through the Russo-Chechen relationship has been the growth of a Chechen mythology, focusing on resistance to authority, and participation in criminal or perceived criminal acts. In the end the myth produced a belief, both inside and outside of Russia, of the existence of a criminal ethnicity as well as a violent and expansive Chechen Mafia. While there are elements of truth to the notion of Chechen criminality, its pervasiveness was uniformly exaggerated. Not all Chechens were criminals in the strictest sense. Although it would be equally false to ignore the role of the perception of Chechen criminality in the formation of an actual Chechen organized crime element. This uniquely Chechen criminal element would eventually provided significant support in the formation of a Chechen government.

Modern Chechen organized crime is neither new nor unprecedented. It sprung from the merger of historic experiences and the exposure to an established Russian criminal world. Faced with competition between empires and the subsequent set of dualities that the competition set in motion, Chechens play the only role they were

equipped to play, that of the intractable rebel. This role of rebel ingratiated them into the Soviet criminal world. Soviet policies and continued demonization further solidified the Chechen identity as one existing outside of Soviet society, while at the same time spreading its people throughout the new empire. Later generations of Chechens would exploit this dispersion with criminal intent. Furthermore, the conditions within the Soviet police state and command economy provided the Chechens with connections and a niche in society. It was a decidedly criminal niche, but one that allowed Chechen criminal groups to amass connections, power and wealth. These connections and resources were in critical demand during the emerging Russian market system. On the eve of Dudayev's putsch the Chechen criminal elements were poised to support the effort for a Chechen bid for independence.

Chechen organized crime became a critical factor in the bid for Chechen independence during final years of the Soviet Union. Its elements had managed to amass significant resources and connections both within Russia and beyond its borders. In an increasingly symbiotic manner political, business and criminal entities began to expand their activities from rudimentary protection and smuggling rackets to more sophisticated endeavors. Chechen business and criminal leaders saw the break-up of the Soviet Union as a perfect situation to increase the potential profit of their organizations. However, for this to occur Chechnya would need a leader who was malleable and sufficiently dependent upon the services only they could provide. For many, Dudayev was thought to be such a leader.

Chechen criminals supported Dudayev's bid for independence with economic, political and logistics support. This support was key to Dudayev's initial push to consolidate power within Chechnya but would lead to several unintended consequences. Criminal support was not free; in exchange for their support Chechen criminals expected positions within the new Chechen government. From these positions the criminals furthered both Dudayev's agenda and their own leading to the eventual collapse of legitimate Chechen economic activity. When the interests conflicted, as would be the case, then the interests of the criminals won out, further compounding the economic and

political situation in Chechnya. Ultimately, a re-evaluation of the cost/benefit calculation led to the fragmentation of both criminal and political power on the eve of the first Russo-Chechen war.

The crime state nexus continued to play a role in reformation of the Chechen state during and after the wars. The criminal and government relationship has reached a state of equilibrium under Ramzan Kadyrov, such that stability and profitability can be balanced. Organized criminals were critical during the push for Chechen independence immediately following the fall of the Soviet Union. They provided necessary resources and capabilities without which the nascent government would have immediately failed. Criminals remain integrated in the government and will likely remain there for the foreseeable future. Gone are the wild days of gangster capitalism to be replaced by a less profitable but more stable relationship.



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